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come from? Was it a Tudor import or was it propagated from the scion of Roman stock, discovered in a weeded-over orchard by the first monks who inherited the site from the Romans? If the latter is the case, the Bethnal Green Mulberry could be a direct lineal descendant of a tree from the time of Constantine – a tree that preserves in its DNA the original import, a tree that bore ancestral fruit which fed the legions of Romans that watched over ancient London.

Julian Forbes-Laird's research resulted in the Bethnal Green Mulberry being reclassified as a Veteran Tree, which affords it extra protection in planning law. Additionally, National Planning Policy Framework was changed in July 2018 to give more protection to Ancient and Veteran Trees. Yet even then the Bethnal Green Mulberry was not saved.

Crest Nicholson's overblown housing scheme plonks a block of luxury flats exactly where the Mulberry grows, which means that when Tower Hamlets planning committee met to consider the application in September 2018, it was confronted with the choice between the tree or the building.

At the meeting, the fresh-faced arboriculturalist employed by the developer declared that he was '100% certain' the tree could survive being dug up and moved, adding that the means of undertaking this would be 'bespoke'. In the way that coffins can be bespoke, I thought. He boasted of 100% success in the moving of Mulberries, yet when questioned was unable to say how many Mulberries he knew of that had been moved. Even the new Tower Hamlets Tree Officer (after the abrupt departure of Edward Buckton), Adam Armstrong, conceded that there was 'a fair probability it would not survive'.

When the Head of Planning was asked if the scheme could be rejigged so that the Bethnal Green Mulberry could be saved, he answered in the affirmative. Then the change in planning law that came into force in July of that year was raised. It gives extra protection to ancient and veteran trees, which can now only be sacrificed for 'wholly exceptional reasons'.

No-one could see how these were 'wholly exceptional reasons', until the Head of Planning explained helpfully that it did not apply – since the proposal was actually to 'save' the Bethnal Green Mulberry by digging it up and moving it.

When it came to the vote, a couple of councillors raised their hands to reject the proposal and a couple raised their hands to accept it. In the chamber, there was confusion and conferring in whispers. The chair announced that three voted to reject it but four voted to accept and one abstained. In spite of the history, in spite of the Tree Protection Order, in spite of the change in Planning Law designed to extend extra protection to Veteran Trees, in spite of three hundred letters of objection by local people and ten thousand signatures on a petition (*fig. 45*), the application was approved. Rather than tell Crest Nicholson to move their proposed building, Tower Hamlets Development Committee granted permission for the development to go ahead and the Bethnal Green Mulberry to be dug up.

Will the tree fall apart? Will it decay and die after moving? Will it flourish for centuries in its new position? Time alone will reveal the fate of the Bethnal Green Mulberry.

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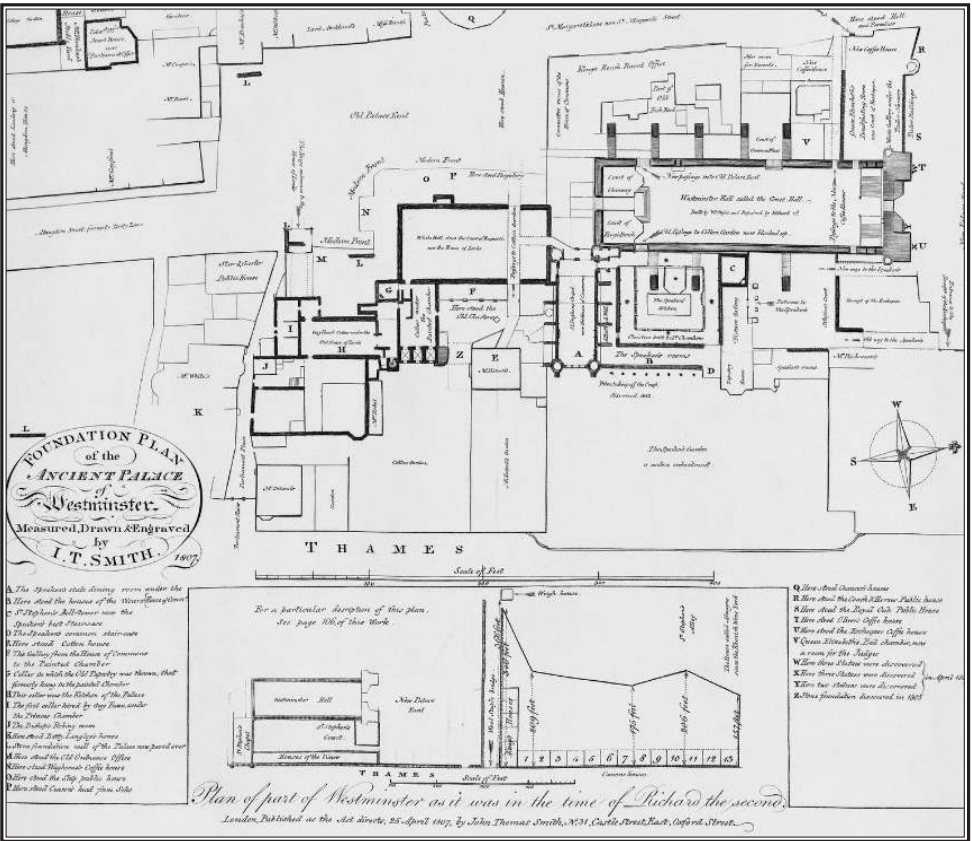
**FROM THE SPEAKER'S GARDEN: REPTON'S  
DESIGNS ON WESTMINSTER**  
*By Stephen Daniels*

One of the discoveries during the bicentenary of Humphry Repton in 2018 was a commission to design a Thameside garden in the Palace of Westminster. As with many new findings, many in publications by the Garden Trusts, the search was prompted by one of the small illustrations Repton drew to be engraved for the annual pocket diary, *Peacock's Polite Repository* (*fig. 46*), one heading each month



44. Illustration from Foxe's *Book of Martyrs* showing Bishop Bonner scourging a heretic in his garden, 1563

45. Symbol for the campaign to SAVE THE BETHNAL GREEN MULBERRY by Paul Bommer



46. John Peltro, after Humphry Repton, *Lambeth Palace from the Garden of the Speaker of the House of Commons.* Headpiece for the month of August, from *Peacock's Polite Repository* for 1808.

47. *Foundation Plan of the Ancient Palace of Westminster,* from John Thomas Smith, *Antiquities of Westminster* (London, 1807)

and a larger one as frontispiece for the year. Repton placed great store on these illustrations, for enhancing his public profile. In *An Inquiry into the Changes of Taste in Landscape Gardening* (1806) he declared he had made 234 views over eighteen years, 'from each of which, I am informed, 7000 impressions have been made, and of course...1,638,000 impressions are in circulation'.<sup>1</sup> A decorative display of 43 proof impressions, arguably made by Repton himself, was made to show the range of properties he improved, from palaces to rectories, 'scenery improving under his direction'.<sup>2</sup> After the end of each year's diary, some purchasers cut out and collected vignettes as souvenirs, and used them as models for their own drawings. Client's families were pleased to see their properties illustrated. 'Pray have you seen the Polite Repository for this Year?', wrote Frances Fitzherbert to a friend in July 1807, of her Yorkshire home, 'as Mr Repton has honoured Langold with a place in it'.<sup>3</sup>

In the absence of other evidence, notably Repton's *Red Books* of plans, the vignettes for the *Polite Repository* are valued as probable evidence of Repton commissions, if there have been doubts about some of tourist scenes or public landmarks. I was initially drawn to one of two vignettes of one landmark, Lambeth Palace, in the *Polite Repository* for the month of August 1808, because it included the tower of the church of St Mary's, which is now the Garden Museum and where the bicentenary exhibition I co-curated, *Repton Revealed*, was staged. On closer viewing, the vignette revealed more, in the foreground, as stated in the caption: 'LAMBETH PALACE from the GARDEN of the Rt Honbl, the Speaker of the House of Commons'.

The Speaker at the time was Charles Abbot, an important, friendly patron of Repton's, who commissioned the landscape gardener to advise on improvements to his estate at Kidbrooke, Sussex, with regular visits

over ten years from 1803.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, in his political role, Abbot assisted Repton's ambitions for two major, if unrealised, schemes, funded by Parliament: landscaping a commemorative coastal estate for the family of Lord Nelson, to be called Trafalgar, and refashioning the buildings and grounds of the Royal Pavilion Brighton.<sup>5</sup> Also in this period Repton was keenly committed to prestigious projects in London with wider implications for public space and urban planning, including designs for the grounds of Carlton House with a vista of Westminster Abbey, for Cadogan, Russell and Bloomsbury Squares and one to convert Burlington House in Piccadilly into Burlington Place, a residential square with shops.<sup>6</sup> All presented site pressures, including complex relations with a range of professional and public interests, which were more intense than on most of Repton's rural and suburban commissions, and a number of projects were either unrealized or partially so. But as Repton declared to the Trustees of Bloomsbury Square, in trying to salvage a scheme that would also have created a major urban vista in north London, he desired 'the satisfaction I feel as a professional man being consulted on a public concern, & a sort of pride in contributing to the Embellishment of the Capital'.<sup>7</sup>

I declared my conjecture that the Speaker's Garden was a Repton site in bicentenary lectures to Garden Trusts, appealing for any further information. I vividly recall the moment at the meeting of the Kent Garden Trust, at Cobham, when Marcus Batty, who was writing the chapter on Repton and Kidbrooke for *Humphry Repton in Sussex*, raised his hand and came up with what proved the clinching evidence, letters from Repton to

4. Marcus Batty, 'Kidbrooke Park, 'a progressive advance in picturesque beauty'', in Susi Batty (ed.), *Humphry Repton in Sussex* (np: Sussex Gardens Trust, 2018), pp.66-76.

5. Daniels, *op. cit.*, pp.90-91, 98, 194. The previous Speaker Henry Addington was an important patron of Repton's, and is fondly recalled in his *Memoir*, if there is no evidence Repton added to the refurbishment of the Speaker's house and garden after Addington took over the former Auditor's house in 1794.

6. Daniels, *op. cit.*, pp.196, 180-192. Susan Jellis, 'Repton's London Squares: Russell Square, Bloomsbury Square and Cadogan Square', in *Repton in London: The Gardens and Landscapes of Humphry Repton (1752-1818) in the London Boroughs* (London: London Parks & Gardens Trust, 2018), pp.31-41. Neil Bingham, 'Humphry and John Adey Repton's unexecuted design for Burlington Place, Piccadilly', *The London Gardener*, Vol. 12 (2006-7), pp.11-19.

7. Quoted in Jellis, *op. cit.*, p.38.

1. Humphry Repton, *An Inquiry into the Changes of Taste in Landscape Gardening* (London: J. Taylor, 1806), p.121.

2. Stephen Daniels, *Humphry Repton: Landscape Gardening and the Geography of Georgian England* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1999), pp.8-9.

3. Patrick Eyres and Karen Lynch, *On the Spot: The Yorkshire Red Books of Humphry Repton, Landscape Gardener* (Huddersfield: New Arcadian Press, 2018), pp.137-138.

Abbot describing work on a site which didn't fit well with Kidbrooke, but did for the Speaker's Garden. I included a brief section on the Speaker's Garden in my exhibition essay for the *Garden Museum* journal.<sup>8</sup> Here I want to expand the investigation to place the garden in the context of Repton's career and also wider developments in the remodelling of the Palace of Westminster and its environs, a complex, and controversial project, which involved a number of authorities, designers, planners, supervisors, committee men, as well as various sources of finance and patronage.

I hope this essay will also help prepare the ground for a project on the place of riverside gardens in the development of Westminster before the great fire of 1834, and its aftermath, which erased Repton's garden, now buried in the foundations for the Palace of Westminster designed by Barry and Pugin. Such a project would extend to examining the development of Repton's business as a family concern, involving his sons, and their ambitions to shape the matrix of urban space and improve the landscape of London.

### 'A burst of architectural scenery'

Repton's plans for the Speaker's Garden were part of the programme to reconstruct the Palace of Westminster, supervised by James Wyatt, in his authority as the King's Architect as well as Surveyor General of the Office of Works. The remodelling of the Speaker's House and Garden was part of the project to reconstruct the riverfront of the Palace, including St Stephen's Chapel, which accommodated the House of Commons. The Commons chamber was enlarged to accommodate a hundred Irish MPs upon the 1800 Act of Union, the Speaker's House to reflect both an increase in Commons business, and Charles Abbot's ambition to expand and reform the office of Speaker upon his appointment in 1802, with suites of state and private rooms, and over new foundations to deal with chronic problems of damp and drainage. Wyatt's scheme was also to create, as

economically as possible in wartime, a composed river frontage for the first time, 'the finest possible picturesque effect' by a façade of gothic styling, staging a foreground to Westminster Abbey beyond, as it appeared to spectators on passing boats and on Westminster Bridge. This was 'a burst of architectural scenery unparalleled in Europe', noted John Soane drily in his Royal Academy Lectures, the architect displaced from Westminster in favour of Wyatt.<sup>9</sup>

Wyatt's gothic restyling of Westminster proved controversial. Genuine medieval features were removed in favour of fabricated ones. Mural paintings in St Stephen's Chapel revealed when the oak wainscoting was removed, along with architectural details and stained glass, were discarded when the walls were cut back to make way for additional benches. Wren's classical interior was retained but his round arched windows were given a new gothic tracery to give the impression of a large east window, and new decorative pinnacles were added. The Speaker's House incorporated spaces of St Stephen's Chapel, its cloister occupied by servants' rooms, its bell tower removed for a staircase, its façade extended and topped with battlements, plastered with a patent cement in which the Wyatt family had a business interest. *The Times* reported in March 1805 that alterations to St Stephen's Chapel 'will add extremely to the effect of the SPEAKER'S House, and give it entirely the air of a grand old dwelling, of which the House of Commons will appear to be a chapel'.<sup>10</sup>

Conservative antiquarians like John Carter had long complained of Wyatt's alterations to medieval buildings, and now parliamentarians, during debates in the Commons, objected to the new styling for Westminster, likening it to that for prisons, cotton mills, even gentleman's lavatories. The

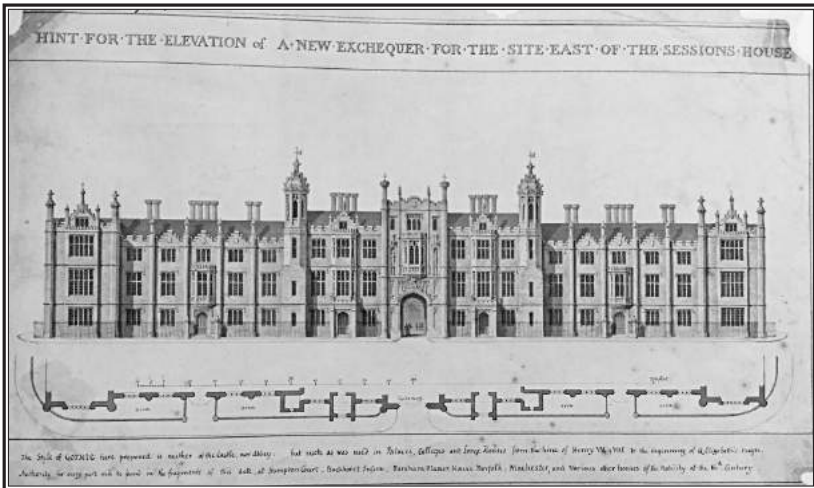
9. Information for this and the next two paragraphs from J. Mordaunt Crook and M.H. Port, *The History of the King's Works Volume VI 1782-1751* (London: HMSO, 1973), pp.512-537. Mark Collins, 'The Topography of the Old Palace of Westminster, 1510-1834', in Warwick Rodwell and Tim Tatton-Brown (eds), *Westminster Part II: The Art, Architecture and Archaeology of the Royal Palace* (London: British Archaeological Association, 2015), pp. 206-256.

10. *The Times*, 26 March 1805.

8. Stephen Daniels, 'Landscapes of Memory, Landscapes of Humphry Repton', *Garden Museum Journal* No.36, Winter 2018/19, pp.26-30.



48. 'North East View of the House of Commons from a drawing by Thomas Sandby',  
'East View of Westminster from a drawings in the possession of Sir James Winter Lake',  
from John Thomas Smith, *Antiquities of Westminster* (London, 1807)



49. T. Leven, *View of the Speaker's House in Westminster* (London, 1810)  
 [COURTESY © TRUSTEES OF THE BRITISH MUSEUM]

50. 'Hint for the Elevation of a New Exchequer for the Site east of the Sessions House',  
 from *Westminster, Plan of Parliament Square* (1808)  
 [COURTESY THE NATIONAL ARCHIVES, KEW, WORK30/464]



Speaker 'joined in condemning the improvements... he declared himself in no way responsible'.<sup>11</sup> Wyatt's plans were cut short, and after his sudden death in a carriage accident in 1813, almost the entire court of professional and public opinion weighed in against him and his work. But not Humphry Repton.

Repton collaborated with Wyatt on a number of commissions, and would have done so more, if the architect had proved a less distracted, more reliable partner. Repton enjoyed his work with Wyatt, recorded their encounters in his *Memoir* of 1814, which included some joint efforts on interior and exterior design, for houses and gardens, and for one client, Lady Sheffield, at Sheffield Place, Sussex, a bird cage and an apron embroidery.<sup>12</sup> Repton's writings on Wyatt are 'the only contemporary analysis' of his work and come closest to speaking on behalf of an architect who was reticent about his work.<sup>13</sup> Repton offered a defence of a style 'which is now so prevalent that it may be called *Modern Gothic*. The details are often correctly Gothic, but the outline is Grecian...in the modern gothic all is flat'. Modern gothic, Repton acknowledged, mixed many period and building styles, of the gothic itself, and 'may offend the eye of the antiquary, or the man of correct taste'; but was an ingenious attempt to 'unite modern comfort' with 'antiquated forms', a key design principle for Repton.<sup>14</sup> Repton's pleasurable recollections of the 'late lamented Wyatt' contrast with the pain of his encounters with the 'fanciful Soane', 'who knows but little about gothic', overturning 'my beautiful plan' at Port Eliot and slighting Repton's 'architectural pretensions' in a lecture to the Royal Academy, with Repton in the audience.<sup>15</sup>

Speaker Abbot authorised the Society of Antiquaries (of which he was a Fellow) to record the medieval features removed from St

George's chapel, as part of a wider survey of the ancient history of the Palace revealed in its reconstruction, published in a lavish volume *The Antiquities of Westminster* (1807) by John Thomas Smith. The illustrations include detailed drawings of medieval features made before they were discarded, engravings of old views which were about to be transformed, current scenes of demolition, and a plan of the whole site tracing historic foundations revealed by demolition and excavation (*fig. 47*). The view recording the former appearance of St Stephen's Chapel, the Speaker's House (then that of the Auditor) and Garden is a new engraving by Smith after a previously unpublished drawing by Thomas Sandby, made in the 1750s when he was making a number of views of Westminster (*fig. 48*). The House and Garden were still being reconstructed when the volume was published. When it was re-issued thirty years later, after the Fire, the editor John Nicol paired it with a print first published in 1810 of the completed scene, from more or less the same angle, if not like Sandby's from within the boundary of the garden, but from Westminster Bridge (*fig. 49*). The screen of trees recorded in mid-eighteenth-century views had now been thinned to reveal the scene. The print is dedicated to the Speaker, explaining how his office now extended into the Chapel:

The Speaker's Dinners are given in the Parlour of the Gothic wing; the upper part of which is the House of Commons, his dining chair is directly under his official one.

The perspectives of both scenes foreshorten the garden, but the Foundation Plan of the Palace in *The Antiquities of Westminster* reveal how extensive it was, and suggest the degree to which its ground was being excavated as part of the rebuilding of the Speaker's House, showing pilings 'discovered 1803'.

It was evident, in the course of the late alterations, on digging in the Speaker's Garden... that the whole of that garden was a modern embankment, that the east wall of that range of building, which had been formerly the vicar's houses, was the extreme boundary wall towards the river, and that the water at one time came

11. 'Westminster Improvements', *Hansard Parliamentary Debates XI* (1808), pp.863-865.

12. Anne Gore and George Carter (eds), *Humphry Repton's Memoirs* (Wilby: Michael Russell, 2005), pp.131-135.

13. John Martin Robinson, *James Wyatt (1746-1813) Architect to George III* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2012), p.298.

14. Humphry Repton, *Fragments on the Theory and Practice of Landscape Gardening* (London: J. Taylor, 1816), pp.17-18.

15. *Repton, Memoirs, op. cit.*, pp.137-138.

close to it, as eight timber piles standing upright in the earth were found there, placed, no doubt, for the purpose of keeping off the craft.<sup>16</sup>

### 'Working for the future'

Repton's role in improving the Speaker's Garden is not recorded, as far as I know, in any public accounts or reports of the remodelling of the site, rather in Abbot's private journal and correspondence, and seems to have been undertaken informally, as part of his long running professional and social relationship with Abbot. This was centred on the programme of work at his Sussex seat, in which Abbot took an active role, which may explain why there is no surviving Red Book of designs for such a major commission, if Abbot's wife was keen to have the drawing engraved for publication in *Peacock's Polite Repository*.<sup>17</sup> The drawing shows a cascade, part of a complex scheme of water management at Kidbrooke, including drainage, ponding and channelling, which may have had a bearing on dealing with the site at Westminster.

Two surviving letters from Repton to Abbot, written a month apart, in February and March 1807, give details of his work on the Speaker's Garden, and some of the difficulties he faced.<sup>18</sup> The first is written from Aylsham, Norfolk, the home of Repton's solicitor son William where he was staying for a week, which, in addition to his own home in Hare Street, Essex, became a second hub of his business. The second is written from Robertson's Hotel in St Martin's Lane, a regular base for dealing with commissions in and around London and meeting clients from country seats staying at their townhouses, or suburban villas, a number to attend parliament, as well as enjoy the capital's entertainments. Another letter from Aylsham in February is to a longstanding patron of Repton's, William Windham, local landowner and national statesman, appealing for William

to continue as his land agent as he took over the business from his deceased uncle.<sup>19</sup> Those from Robertson's Hotel the following month include one to the Duke of Bedford's agent William Adam, defending his plans for Bloomsbury Square and two to William explaining that John Adey was visiting a villa commission in Tottenham, while he met with clients and picked up some business, and they both attended the meetings of the Royal Society and Society of Antiquaries, where Repton was keen to promote his son's work.<sup>20</sup>

The first letter from Repton on the Speaker's Garden, 'the business you commit to my care', notes that Repton was 'extremely hurt' at the receipt of one from Abbot, which seems arose from staff on site, including the assistant to the clerk of the works, Charles Bacon, not managing to follow directions on drainage. Repton appealed for Bacon to write to him personally to 'describe their difficulty, perhaps I could remove it before I come to town which will not be till late next week'.

The General principle is thus to hollow the ground between the house & terrace that the water may fall from each towards the centre where drains may be concealed & this would be so gradual a fall as to be imperceptible to the eye – tho it would keep the house and the Terrace perfectly dry.

In the second letter Repton confesses:

I meant to have given you no trouble on the subject of the Garden (which is become a favourite with me) but I yesterday received a note from Mr Groves [the Clerk of the Works] begging me to fix an hour for meeting him on the Spot – after several messages – it is now fixed for tomorrow (Friday) at 3 o'clock when you will probably be engaged, but if you could let Mr Burchel or his foreman know that I shall be there – perhaps it may forward the planting by a few days.

[William Burchell was the Fulham nurseryman who also supplied Kidbrooke.]

Repton lists what he has done. He has found 'a gang of blundering Irish Labourers'

16. John Thomas Smith, *Antiquities of Westminster* (London: T. Bensley, 1807), p.231.

17. Batty, *op. cit.*

18. Humphry Repton to Charles Abbot, 9 February 1807, 12 March 1807. *Calchester Papers*, PRO 30/9/15; 30/9/35, p.345.

19. Humphry Repton to William Windham, British Library Add MSS 37918 f.151.

20. Daniels, *Humphry Repton, op. cit.*, p.291, n. 177. Humphry Repton to William Repton, 12, 13 March 1807. Huntington Library HM 40845/1-2.

who looked 'to take a month doing what they ought to finish in a week. but since the Union, I suppose it is quite right to employ Irish Labour altho they get [?] in each other's way'.

I have directed them to finish the ground near the house & leave the Centre to the last – by this means we shall be able to form the margins to be planted & have a depot of good mould for the shrubs on the spot, although I think very little planting will be required – if by any good fortune I could have five minutes conversation with you on the Spot, I could explain the matter – I know exactly your wishes – I believe.

Abbot's wishes were to fund as much as possible from the parliamentary grant:

Your interest individually is a life Estate & you wish not to incur expense of shrubs or plants -- but you have a permanent interest in keeping the house dry & this is at the publick Expense which I have not spared – because we are working for the future. I only regret the awkwardness of the persons employed.

Letters from Repton to Abbot the following year extend Repton's designs on Westminster, in the competition for replanning of the area on the western side of the Palace undergoing demolition and clearance, a programme largely driven by the Speaker.<sup>21</sup> Repton includes a series of suggestions for the siting and style of new buildings, and seeks private and confidential advice on what he had in mind and what would be acceptable given Wyatt's fall from favour. But Repton did not want his own name included in a submission, 'because I must not run to lose'. He saw the competition as an opportunity for John Adey to 'draw himself into publick notice'... 'his ambition looks to some great publick work & you who are so good a father yourself will allow for the ambition of a father for that of a son'. George Repton, still in Nash's office, formally collaborated on the submission, along with assistant clerk of the works at Westminster, Charles Bacon (who had also worked on the Speaker's Garden). Their scheme for a new

Exchequer, residential apartments, and streetscapes, was dramatic (*fig. 50*), even suggesting St Margaret's Church might be removed to clear a vista of Westminster Abbey. They were awarded the £210 premium, but the plans were not realised.<sup>22</sup>

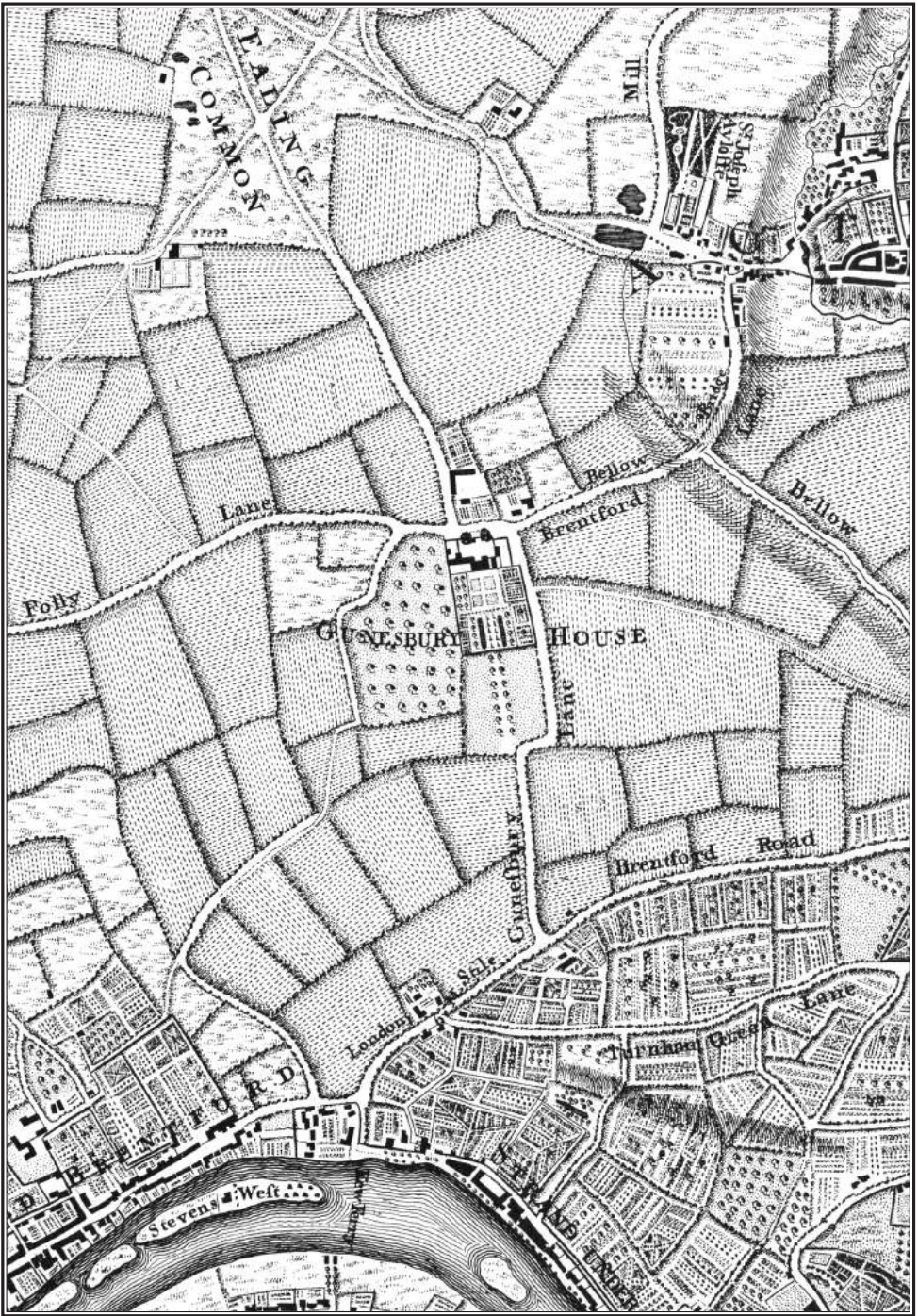
To publish his vignette of Lambeth Palace from the Speaker's Garden in *Peacock's Polite Repository* for 1808 [see *fig. 46*], the design would have been submitted at the time Repton was writing his letters on the site, and so, like many other Repton views, it was a projection, of a work in progress, 'improving under his direction'. Two figures, perhaps representing designer and client, look out from the path over the fence at a classic Thames view. Rivercraft include trade and leisure vessels, notably a sailing barge, reminiscent of the one Repton featured in the designs for Point Pleasant upstream.<sup>23</sup> Dead centre, across the river, is the tower of St Mary's Church, Lambeth. The church was increasingly regarded as an antiquarian site, as Lambeth expanded as a modern, commercial centre, for its many tombs, notably that of the Tradescants, plant collectors and designers, restored in the later eighteenth century. The tower was also a vantage point for looking at London, observing its topography, focussing on Westminster. As in commissions elsewhere, Repton borrows views of neighbouring estates, making them intervisible so, looking at a place which is also a vantage point for a reciprocal reverse view. The view connects two major power houses, that of the Speaker of the Commons, and that of the Archbishop of Canterbury, with whom Abbot frequently exchanged visits. It remains to be seen whether Repton advised at Lambeth Palace too: a view in *Peacock's Polite Repository* of the Palace through one of the arches of Westminster Bridge enhances the possibility.

The Speaker's Garden along with some of the grand rooms of the house became part of the political theatre of the remodelled Palace of Westminster. Given the importance

21. Humphry Repton to Charles Abbot, 11, 29 November 1808. Colchester Papers.

22. *House of Commons Reports from Committees – Session 1 November – 24 July, 1810–1811*. Volume 11, p.112. George Repton to John Adey Repton, January 1809, Huntington Library HM 40916.

23. Daniels, *Humphry Repton, op. cit.*, p.211.



51. The Gunnersbury estate set in a rural landscape north of the market town of Brentford, extract from John Rocque's *Map of London & Environs*, 1746

of accommodating Irish MPs to the remodelling of the site, and of Irish labourers to remaking the garden to Repton's directions, it is appropriate that an eloquent description comes from the pen of Ireland's leading poet. Thomas Moore records in his journal coming to the Commons on a momentous occasion, to hear Daniel O'Connell speak upon the passing of the Act of Catholic Emancipation, and was summoned to dine afterwards with Ellen, the new wife of the Speaker Charles Manners Sutton.

Amused to see her, in all her state, the same hearty, lively Irish woman still. Walked with her in the garden, the moonlight on the river, the boats gliding along it, the towers of Lambeth rising on the opposite bank; the lights of Westminster Bridge gleaming on the left; and then, when one turned around to the House, that beautiful Gothic structure, illuminated from within, and at that moment containing within it the council of the nation – all was most picturesque and striking.<sup>24</sup>

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#### Acknowledgements

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## TRANSFORMING GUNNERSBURY'S GARDENS 1660-1760

By Val Bott, with James Wisdom

The substantial restoration programme at Gunnersbury, completed in 2018, prompted a closer study of the landscape and a more detailed analysis of the archive acquired at its purchase as a public park in late 1925. This has revealed Henry Furnese's transformation of the formal mid-seventeenth-century garden into a softer arcadian landscape.

Shortly before Christmas 1739 Henry Furnese MP agreed to buy the Gunnersbury estate in Brentford in the parish of Ealing with its associated farmland for £12,700. The seller, John, Lord Hobart, of Blickling in Norfolk, was the great-grandson and heir of Sir John Maynard, who had transformed Gunnersbury between 1658 and 1663 with a Palladian mansion and formal gardens. At his death in 1690 Maynard left a complex will. It required an Act of Parliament in 1737 to enable Hobart to dispose of the estate which, he argued, was by then too costly to repair. Although Maynard's heirs had used the place as a summer residence in the very early eighteenth century, financial difficulties and family bereavements convinced a younger generation they no longer wanted this old-fashioned and run-down estate.

What Furnese acquired in 1739 comprised the estate, mansion and outbuildings, amounting to 14 acres, of which 8 acres were gardens 'walled in and otherwise'.<sup>1</sup> Extensive farmland would also bring Furnese an income. John Millett occupied 'farm house barn stables and house stead' – this was Gunnersbury Farm, which stood across the lane from the main gate. The farm and its land, comprising about 280 acres, had been leased to Millett for 21 years from Michaelmas 1738 at a yearly rent of £258. Leases on other properties with land in nearby Ealing and Acton were made or renewed at the same date.

24. Lord John Russell (ed.), *Memoirs, Journal and Correspondence of Thomas Moore*, Volume VI (London: Longman, 1854), p.32. I owe this reference to a forthcoming article by Elizabeth Hallam Smith on the Speaker's House.

NOTE: Numbered schedules refer to a contemporary transcript of Furnese's Probate Accounts, DP119 (b) held by Ealing Council's Legal Services Department.

1. 'Bargain & Sale of the capital and messuage and manor of Gunnersbury', Norfolk Record Office, Blickling archive NRS 12938, 27E7 and later transcript, Ealing Legal Department, DP119 (a).