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University
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Sheffield.



A LIFE IN LANDSCAPES
from
PAGE TO GARDEN

REPTON AND HORTICULTURE

A Conference held in the Dorothy Fox Education Centre at the Sheffield Botanical Gardens, 20 and 21 September 2018, for Humphry Repton's bicentenary.

Organised by the Friends of the Botanical Gardens and the Department of Landscape of the University of Sheffield.

When Humphry Repton (1752-1818) introduced the term 'landscape gardening' he saw this as a new profession where a designer of a landscape was no longer involved with the practical aspects of implementing a scheme. Instead he produced written and illustrated volumes that were presented as Red Books, bound in red maroc, containing proposals that were left to be implemented by their owners; some gardens were laid out years after they had been designed.

This meant that he would have been divorced from practical horticulture, yet he was interested in botany and gardening as a leisure activity and he lived in interesting times of significant change. He had known Capability Brown's parks of classical austerity, which were criticised by the next generation, and he ended up in the centre of the Picturesque debate that saw him challenged on the form and maintenance of his designs. He also saw the start of an influx of exotic plants after the ending of the Continental Blockage in 1814.

These developments evoked responses from Repton which affected the appearance of his gardens and ultimately also general horticultural practice. Yet with the emphasis in research and writing having been on his design practices and influences, the horticultural aspects have been largely overlooked and that will be addressed by this conference.

This conference explores the contribution of horticulture to Reptonian parks and gardens, and raises a number of questions:

- What was the contribution of horticulture to the gardens designed by Repton; what was the socio-economic context and how did this affect change?
- What horticultural trends can be evidenced from his designs?
- How were his gardens designed, implemented and maintained; did this differ from previous generations?

PROGRAMME:

Thursday 20 September 2018

9:30 -17:00: the talks include:

‘Humphry Repton, Landscape Gardener, 1752-1818’

Peter H. Goodchild, Director of the GARLAND Trust (The Garden and Landscape Heritage Trust)

Humphry Repton is best known as a ‘landscape gardener’, a profession that he himself sought to establish and for which he invented the name. It was not, however, the profession that his father intended for him, nor was it one that he embarked upon until he was in his mid 30s, halfway through his life. Nevertheless, his life before taking up landscape gardening, was an essential period of personal development for this profession. In my talk, I will provide an outline of Repton’s life, his personality, the cultural context of his career, and his significance in relation to the history of landscape gardening.

‘The Art of Concealment and the Concealment of Art’

Camilla Beresford, Consultant Landscape Architect and Historian

Many of Repton’s recommendations involved the judicious removal of trees to reveal attractive features or undulating ground, which he described as undrawing the curtains. Conversely he also ‘drew the curtains’ by planting shrubberies, clumps and belts to disguise offices, less attractive buildings, or boundary fences. His ‘before’ and ‘after’ views in his Red Books were adept at showing this and gained him clients. The talk will discuss what Repton chose to conceal or reveal, how the planting varied from a static point to a circuit around the landscape, and the types of plants used. Are Repton’s methods still applicable today and should they be used to open or close new views in Repton landscapes?

‘Humphry Repton at Woburn, Bedfordshire: Before and After the Red Book’

Professor Mark Laird, University of Toronto (a virtual lecture)

In Humphry Repton’s Red Book for Woburn Abbey, submitted in 1805, Brown’s ‘removal’ of gardens is referred to as an ‘inconvenient part of his system’. This talk will examine the basis of that argument and the resulting claim that Repton brought ‘specialized gardens’ (with distinctive horticulture) back around the house, notably at Woburn. It will also review what followed after the Red Book proposals, notably through examining what is revealed in James Forbes’s Hortus Woburnensis of 1833.

‘Horticulture as Recreation for the Regency Lady’

Dr. Kate Felus, Historic Landscape Consultant and Author

Throughout the eighteenth century botany was an acceptable scientific pursuit for ladies of the middle and upper classes. Its sister discipline of horticulture was also encouraged. Many such ladies had a love of plants nurtured in them as children and grew up to be knowledgeable botanists and plantswomen. The period was also a time during which the pursuit of ‘contriving improvements’ was carried out practically as a leisure activity. This talk will discuss the role of women in the garden in the Regency period, in terms of both design and hands-on gardening. It will give the social context against which we can see Repton’s work, where the lady of the house was key to the project.

‘Humphry Repton and the Development of the Flower Garden’

Mick Thompson, Gardens Manager, Ashridge

Humphry Repton was at the forefront of a significant change in garden design towards the end of the eighteenth and into the nineteenth century. In many of his commissions he would make proposals for flower gardens. This talk will look at many of these proposals from an historical design perspective with Repton being seen as reviving the use of flower gardens, whilst also considering the great influx of new plants during the period and how they fit into Repton’s understanding of plants.

‘Repton’s use of colour in his planting schemes, landscapes and Red Books’

Jon Finch, Reader in archaeology, University of York

This talk will explore Repton’s relationship with colour. It will explore his use of colour in his planting schemes and landscapes as well as in his Red Books. It will place him within the context of contemporary colour theory and suggest that colour was a wider and more significant concept than is currently acknowledged in the garden history literature.

‘Reptonian influences on the late Regency planting at St James’ Park’

Dr Jan Woudstra, Reader in landscape history and theory, Department of Landscape, University of Sheffield

Although Repton and his son John Adey fell out with architect John Nash in the late 1790s, Nash had absorbed his former partner’s principles of design and applied them to urban schemes and parks, probably aided by Repton’s other son, George Stanley. Thus Reptonian principles were used to turn St James’ Park into a modern public park. This talk investigates the design of the park in the context of provisions for the general public, and with respect to the design detail, particularly the shrubberies. The latter feature as an innovation in Prince Pueckler Muskau’s Hints on Landscape Gardening (1835) as being laid according to the ‘principles of Mr Nash’. This has been repeated ever since, but deserves critical review.

‘Historic England Guidance: Late Georgian Hardy Plant List (1780-1820)’

Dr Sarah Rutherford, Historic Garden Consultant

To contribute to the work on Repton 200 in 2018, Historic England commissioned a plant list as a starting point for researchers and those restoring landscapes of the period 1780-1820, along with supporting information. It provides a core list of hardy plants commonly available and used and still widely available. This introductory guide provides a basic palette which can be supplemented by other plants identified in wider resources including those in the references list supplied, site archives, and tailored to local availability and conditions. The list assumes a basic knowledge of garden plants and their cultivation and can be used together with design advice of the period, which is signposted in a planting styles overview, and itemised in the references and further resources lists in the document. Its author, Sarah Rutherford, will present a brief explanation of the contents and its purpose.

‘Two Centuries of Repton’s Reputation’

Brent Elliott, formerly Librarian then Historian, Royal Horticultural Society

abstract to follow

'Introducing Wentworth Woodhouse'

Dr Patrick Eyres and Karen Lynch, authors of *On the Spot: the Yorkshire Red Books of Humphry Repton, landscape gardener*

A brief introduction to the park at Wentworth Woodhouse and Repton's work there. This will set the scene for the visit to Wentworth Woodhouse where we will learn what Repton proposed 'on the spot' and which of his plans were implemented.

Friday 21 September 2018

9:30 - 15.30: Tour of the Repton landscape at Wentworth Woodhouse