

REVEALING REPTON: BRINGING LANDSCAPE TO LIFE AT SHERINGHAM PARK

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ABSTRACT

The year 2012 marked 200 years since Humphry Repton (1752-1818) produced his design for Sheringham Park in north Norfolk, bound as one of his famous Red Books. On paper, Repton is England's best known and most influential landscape gardener. On the ground, his work is much harder to identify, focused as it was on light touches that equated more to landscape makeover than the landscape making of his predecessor Lancelot 'Capability' Brown. This paper documents and evaluates the activities of a project that celebrated this bicentenary through a temporary exhibition within the Visitor Centre of Sheringham Park (National Trust), whilst also making reference to the commemoration of his work in other places and on paper. In attempting to reveal Repton at Sheringham we explore both the context of the 1812 commission and the longer landscape history of the site, as well as the different methods of re-presenting Repton on site that are open to site owners and managers.

KEYWORDS

Humphry Repton; Sheringham Park; designed landscapes; reveal; National Trust

On paper Humphry Repton (1752-1818) is England's best known and most influential landscape gardener. Unlike the figure he claimed as his predecessor Lancelot 'Capability' Brown (1716-1783), Repton wrote and drew a great deal, in consciously artistic published works as well as manuscript designs, and expressed his social and aesthetic views in a memoir as well as extensive correspondence (Repton, 1794, 1803, 1806, 1816; Daniels, 1986, 1999; Gore and Carter, 2005; Rogger, 2007). The highly pictorial and consciously theoretical nature of Repton's work, made it, by his own estimation, one of the landscape arts, and 'landscape gardening' was a term he claimed to have coined. Brown called his own work 'place making', and his map like plans are often sparse looking preliminaries to the work he completed on site, impressive, often grand style parks, many of which like Blenheim and Croome Court, are well known, and more of which are being brought to light with plans for the tercentenary celebrations of Brown's birth in 2016.¹

REPTON IN RUINS

We know much more about Repton on paper than we do on the ground. Relatively few, little more than 40 of his over 400 commissions, appear to be found on site, in whole or part (Hyams, 1971, p.230-237).² Many of Repton's commissions were for small properties, for merchants and minor gentry, a more reclusive and domestic clientele than the nobility and aristocracy who commissioned Brown and wished to impress their commanding importance publicly in grandiloquent landscapes. The villa properties of Repton's clientele, many close to large towns and cities, proved vulnerable to urban growth, changes of land use and ownership, in Repton's own time, as well as since. Repton did work on a number of larger estates, but on these he tended to operate in a small compass, and often minor scale, with relatively ephemeral features - placing a pavilion here, trimming some trees there, putting up a trellis, cutting a path. This was less the making of the landscape (as practised by Brown through major earth moving and hydraulic engineering) than the makeover of the landscape, a

sometimes cosmetic operation. Repton's light touches were designed to have dramatic effects, but often proved temporary. In places, Repton's name, as well as work, was often overshadowed by others, including professional rivals, which is why he was keen to make more of name for himself in publication, sometimes to exclude the contribution of others, and in general to raise his profile in the history of design. There were a few exceptions to this pattern of erasure, for example at Sheringham Park in Norfolk, the main subject of this article, where a combination of congenial client, small estate, long single family ownership and geographical location, ensured the survival of a design on the ground.

The discrepancy between Repton's works on paper and on the ground was built into his practice. Repton was a consultant, not like Brown a contractor, whose assistants and associates supervised place making from plan to park. Repton's designs were left for others – owners, stewards, surveyors, clerks of the works, gardeners, builders, as well as other designers – to oversee, adapt, specify or ignore, and so it is not surprising that they sometimes turned out rather differently to the way he envisaged. Repton seemed more concerned about meaning than making, or rather book making than place making. The famous Red Books of designs are finely produced albums of estates views and descriptions, with seductive watercolour pictures and high minded text in copperplate calligraphy; the finest were designed for the library, as much works of reflection rather than action, records of socialising with the owner and his family as much as they were blueprints for the park (Rogger, 2007; Daniels, 1999). Some owners were so impressed they kept them as albums of ideal views, never putting them into practice. This is not to say that Repton's work was about image and not reality. No less than other landscape arts of the period, in other media, Repton's Red Books *matter*, materially as well as socially, as part of the fabric of the rooms they were designed to be admired in, rooms that often looked out on the places the Red Books re-visioned.

The ruination of Repton's work on the ground occurred, as he observed, in his own lifetime, and he spent much of the later part of his career, when he found new commissions hard to secure, lamenting the condition of earlier plans he had put into practice. With an eye on posterity, Repton's final published work, *Fragments on the Theory and Practice of Landscape Gardening* (1816), is, as the title suggests, a record of the break up his profession, but also a collection of valued pieces, extracts from treasured commissions, which might be reassembled, as it were, archaeologically, at some time in the future, to restore landscape gardening and to rediscover 'a lost art' (Daniels, 2004a). Repton's restorative impulse, with a religious sense of redeeming a fallen world (Lowenthal, 2013) extended to new commissions he was able to secure. He researched archives to remake past landscapes, in antiquarian style, and talked with local old labourers about their memories of the way things were (Daniels 2004a). Landscape gardening at this time was actually doing remarkably well, in a post-war economic depression, if not so in Repton's name, as he suffered a steep, if not unremitting, personal and professional decline.

REPTON REVIVED

The ruination of surviving Repton landscapes on the ground, through the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, was accompanied by a revival of his work on paper, through republication, scholarship, and recirculation in professional design, in different media and formats, diffusing a Reptonian style to a range of places in different periods, from extensive American parks to small English suburban gardens (Daniels, 2004a).³ Perhaps it is the very scarcity of sites on the ground, and the power of his work on paper, that is a clue to Repton's perennial cultural significance, revived for example as an exemplar for the early years of American landscape architecture (Downing 1841; Nolan, 1907), with Olmsted's informal 'Repton Club' of 1898 (Newton, 1971, p.386) and a later inspiration for scenographic parkways. For the new world of Sixties Britain, Reyner Banham looked to Repton as model

design professional, “I dig the landscape scene more than most art forms” he announced in 1962, “I have actually read two of Repton’s Red Book in the original handwriting” (Banham, 1996, p.87). Overlay drawing and paper craft has persisted in the repertoire of studio teaching in landscape architecture (Sullivan, 2012) and digital modelling has long diffused the method, and some of its aesthetic and ethical questioning, to landscape visualisation and environmental planning (Sheppard, 2001). Recent projects reclaim Repton as a pioneer explorer of edgeland “suburban pastoral”, the road verge “soft estate” and the “composite landscape” of photo-collage (Daniels, 2004b; Chell, 2014; Waldheim and Hansen, 2013). Of all historic landscape designers, Repton is most often enlisted as a model of modernity, of avant-gardening.

The Red Books themselves have become increasingly valuable, with fine examples selling abroad to wealthy libraries and collectors.⁴ In the last thirty years, the recognition and restoration of Repton’s work on the ground has increased significantly. This has been part of a wider revival of country house landscape conservation, prompted partly by cultural campaigning for a ‘heritage in danger’ but also by the increasingly commercial and amenity value of such landscapes (Stroud, 1961; Strong, 1974; Carter *et al.*, 1982).⁵ We will begin with a canonical country-house landscape.

Woburn Abbey was one of Repton’s treasured fragments in later life. He advised on the place for a number of years and wrote, “The improvements I have had the honour to suggest have no where been so fully realized” (Repton, 1816, p.148). Yet during the twentieth century, even from 1955 as Woburn was redeveloped as a visitor attraction, Repton’s gardens remained ruined or overgrown. The bicentenary of “the completion of Repton’s superb landscaped gardens at Woburn Abbey” in 2010 provided the impetus for the restoration of the pleasure grounds, for a paying public who now expect to see gardens as well architecture on a visit to a stately home.⁶

Featuring contributions from his architect son John Adey, the *Red Book for Woburn* (1805) is one of Repton's longest, most lavishly pictorial, including some of his most ambitious plans.⁷ Whilst the designs encompass a range of sites at Woburn, re-routing roads and the approach, and recommending the construction of a new bridge, cottage ornée and other decorative buildings, the focus is a new pleasure ground. The design proposed a coordinated series of specialist gardens including an American garden, arboretum, Chinese garden surrounding the existing Chinese dairy, rosary, botanic garden and menagerie, all surrounding the nucleus of the design - a forcing garden. The sixth Duke of Bedford also contracted Repton to direct some of the ground operations, if Repton was apparently little seen at Woburn during periods of the Duke's absence, leaving the ground staff puzzled as to the exact nature of the plans (Daniels, 1999). Before featuring in *Fragments*, large extracts of the Red Book were first adapted by Repton for *An Enquiry into the Changes of Taste in Landscape Gardening* (1806). When Woburn's gardener James Forbes described the pleasure grounds in *Hortus Woburniensis* (1833) new features had been added by the Duke, and the space reserved for the walled forcing garden turfed and planted, but the framework of Repton's design had been retained, with Forbes giving Repton credit for the original design.

As in Repton's own time (the Duchess appears in his 'View from the salon'), it is now the lady of the house, the new Duchess of Bedford, who, from 2006, promoted the garden restoration, and as also in his own time, he was the brand name for the award winning programme of work – an ongoing process of excavating, replanting and reconstructing gardens and buildings (including some never before realised), supplemented by a small interpretive display, study days and a programme of guided tours (Figure 1).⁸ The Dukes of Bedford were Repton's most important later patrons, and his landscaping is being revealed again on other parts of their former estate, now in different ownership. With a grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund, Repton's design for Russell Square was restored 2001 by

Camden Council, and the owners of the Bedford former holiday home, Endsleigh, in Devon, now a luxury hotel, are currently using Repton's plans to restore the grounds there, exchanging information, practice and plant material with Woburn, where the Red Book is still held, and holding a series of celebratory events in 2014.⁹

REPTON REVEALED

Focussing on a project to commemorate the bicentenary of Repton's 1812 design for Sheringham in Norfolk, owned by National Trust, this article now describes and reflects on a different form of Repton re-presentation on site than physical conservation, restoration or recreation. The project is expressly interpretative, recovering more the mentality of landscape gardening than its materiality, making critical appraisal as well as creative celebration, more history than heritage. The project was less a matter of restoration than revelation, of uncovering what was hitherto hidden, the secret lives of landscape.

A broadly revelatory rationale has recently proved to be popular in heritage projects. These include various efforts to uncover 'hidden histories' (Driver and Jones, 2009; Driver, 2012), of subaltern aspects of architecture and landscape and its making, of servants, slaves, and the labouring poor. It also includes recovering the social complexities of the social stratum who owned and managed properties, including the role of women and the professions in an increasingly consumer culture. So the 2013-2014 *Georgians Revealed* exhibition at the British Library (marking the tercentenary of the accession of George I to the throne) included a guided walk to discover the landscape of Georgian London within walking distance of the building, as well as a display of objects, card games, silk shoes, and picture books – including Repton's publications – which made up the material world of wealthy trades families as well as landed aristocrats (see Goff *et al.*, 2013).¹⁰ A revelatory rationale may imply a lighter touch form of restoration. Publicising English Heritage's work on Capability Brown's Wrest Park, Bedfordshire, John Watkins (Head of Gardens and Landscapes) explained the challenge

as “one of ‘revelation’ over restoration, a less intrusive process of uncovering ‘ghosts in the landscape’ and revealing what already exists, such as Wrest’s miles of paths” (in Dennison, 2011). In the process, here and elsewhere, Brown’s own landscaping may be revealed, as Repton himself was keen to reveal it to hostile critics, as less heavy handed than Brown’s reputation suggests, more about pleasure grounds and finely detailed pictorial and architectural effect, than massive park construction, about continuities with previous histories of landscape (Repton, 1794).

Revelation has a specific meaning for Repton’s methods of design. These were meant to disclose scenes either hidden by development and growth, or inherent in the landscape, waiting as it were to be released. No less than for the term restoration, there was a religious association to this, if it was an evangelical one, of dramatic conversion, of seeing the light. And for Repton, both playful and pious, revelation has a decidedly theatrical sense, of scene shifting and denouement as dramatic views were engineered. At Sheringham, as the Red Book reported, the client considered the treasures of the places were “concealed in a casket” which Repton would open, with its “latent beauties bursting on my ‘raptur[e]d sight”” (Repton, 1812).

Our own project of revelation at Sheringham sought to uncover a sense of historical geography. This was both synchronic, in focussing on a particular period and place around 1812, and diachronic, charting some of the longer term developments on site before, after and beyond Repton’s design. So the short story, of the commission, which did indeed have the narrative arc of a novel, with a cast of characters, and an unhappy ending, was situated in a longer landscape history, from the remote to the recent past. Geographically, the project situated the local circumstances of Sheringham within a wider world; regional, national and international (see Daniels, 1993, 1999; Daniels and Veale, 2012; Finch, 2013). This was part of Repton’s vision, and indeed the scope of the landscape arts around 1812, as a way of

understanding and imagining the world, exploring the long ago and far away, the overseas, and imperial interests of a nation at war, and its archaeological and geological ancestry. At Sheringham some of wider these concerns are compressed within a small compass: it is an intense landscape.

We sought to create an installation at Sheringham that would display Repton's importance on site. This would impress visitors with the authorship of his design, but we also set his authorship in a more extensive landscape history, including glaciation, prehistoric settlement and early modern farming, considering how the physical and social environment shaped Repton's design as much as he, in turn, shaped it. Funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) through its 'Care for the Future' theme, this was also part of National Trust's programme to 'Bring Properties to Life'. The project chimed with National Trust's renewed emphasis on 'landscape' as a cultural amenity, a space beyond such categories as architecture, gardens, nature and countryside. So the project was a matter of bringing landscape to life as well as reviving Repton's role in designing it. We had short time frame, six months to come up with a plan and implement it, but a willing team, including academic colleagues from the University of East Anglia, a Norwich based design consultancy (Ugly Studios), and, decisively, property staff and volunteers at Sheringham Park who made significant contributions at all stages of the process.

The centrepiece of the project is a physical installation in a converted barn. This was designed to restage the specific context of Repton's commission at Sheringham in 1812, a highly troubling one for a nation at war and also beset by internal social conflicts. The installation also displayed some of the longer term social and environmental implications of the design, putting Repton's own authorship in terms of other human and natural agencies of landscape formation. The installation included a range of audio visual features, digital and material, and was complemented by an illustrated catalogue (Daniels and Veale, 2012) for

sale in the onsite shop and a mobile phone application (for free download or in leaflet form) following the already existing ‘Repton route’ park trail.¹¹ The project sought to show aspects of Repton’s art of landscape gardening than might not be fully evident either on paper – including scholarly literature – or on the ground, and with a Reptonian sense of theatricality and surprise.

REPTON AT SHERINGHAM

Sheringham is the best surviving example of Repton’s work on the ground *as a landscape*, a comprehensive design taking in a range of estate features, rather than, at Woburn, mainly an enclosed set of gardens (Hyams, 1971, Daniels, 1999). The small scale Sheringham commission was very different to Woburn, a great estate, within a days ride of London, with vast mansion set in a vast park of thousands of hectares, and a continuing history of fashioning and refashioning, in which Repton was one name among many. A farming estate on the Norfolk coast, owned by a local squire, the entire Sheringham estate was little more than a thousand acres (400 hectares). Sheringham wasn’t a blank canvas for Repton’s art; its working landscape had already been informally ornamented by the previous owner, a gentleman farmer. Repton took advantage of existing planting and physiography to fashion an extensive programme of improvements, including a stylish new residence.

Sheringham, declared Repton in the Red Book, was “my most favourite work” (Repton, 1812). There were a number of reasons for this: the estate was situated in his home county of Norfolk, where he thought he should be more recognized, and his client, Abbot Upcher, a young squire and his family, shared Repton’s sociable values, the landscape gardener and his architect son visited frequently to witness the design being put into effect (Yaxley, 1986). Repton had initially promoted this sea view estate, on the eastern coast of England, exposed to threat of Napoleonic invasion, as a memorial for Lord Nelson, a fellow

Norfolkman, and for Upcher designed a more domestic vision of national landscape, and which he saw under construction (Daniels, 1999).

Abbot Upcher died before the mansion was completed, but his descendants completed the plans at Sheringham, with a few changes, notably the eventual building of one of the pivots of the design, the temple, in 1975 in a slightly different site but articulating the same panorama, and the lining of part of Repton's drive in the later nineteenth century with rare rhododendrons. Following the death of the last of the Upcher line in 1985, and a public appeal when the estate was put up for sale, National Trust purchased Sheringham in November 1986. The post-war period of 'saving' country houses, with which the Trust had become closely, and critically, identified, was giving way to a reassertion of its original remit of providing public access to the countryside, and a cool appraisal of the costs of conserving aristocratic heritage. The size of the estate in 1986 was approximately 310 hectares. Weybourne Heath was added in the 1990s and, alongside smaller acquisitions, brings the present acreage to 405 hectares - just less than the area purchased by Abbot Upcher in 1812.

National Trust leased the mansion to private owners to help offset the costs of running the park and it remains closed to the general visitor. Constructing a car park near to the Hall would also have interrupted the very views that the Trust had bought the property to protect. Keith Zealand, the Head Ranger at Sheringham from the time of the purchase (and in the early days the only member of dedicated staff at the property), describes Repton's Red Book for Sheringham as his 'management plan' for the park and has used its content to inform his team's work at the property. By the 1980s, key plantings had reached a state of 'over maturity', and with the erosion of some vantage points, Repton's design was obscured. Much of the Trust's early work was spent removing dead elm trees – victims of Dutch elm disease – and in 1987, the Great Storm led to further losses of mature trees. The rhododendron collection built up by the Upchers had become greatly overgrown and dominated by the

invasive *R. Ponticum*, and in the process of removal long forgotten trees and shrubs, including ancient oaks, were uncovered along the main drive. Since then more infrastructure has been put into place to reveal the design, often raised above what are now much taller trees than Repton would have tolerated: new level pathways, and viewing towers, including a gazebo built on the summit of the park on the site of an observation tower built to watch for an invading Napoleonic army (Zealand, 1998).

The view from the gazebo reveals the features Repton took advantage of in his improvements, and yet which also to a casual spectator serve to obscure the key role of his design (Figure 2). We see a remarkably fine range of landscape types, within a short distance, ancient and modern woodland, heath, parkland, pleasure ground, farmland and coast. It looks like an exemplary ‘country park’. Few visitors to this, one of the top rated properties in the East of England for visitor enjoyment with over 200,000 visitors in 2013, come specifically to see Repton’s work, and many remained unaware during their visit that it was a designed landscape at all. This is, in part, a reflection of the success of Repton’s design, the way he worked with a site that opened up to the countryside more widely, making fewer major physical interventions, in the way of earth moving, hydraulics, horticulture or ornamentation, than many conspicuously ornamental, grand style landscape gardens, including National Trust properties like Stowe and Stourhead. While the landscape of Sheringham is clearly managed, even planned, it tends to be seen as nature, not culture, let alone a work of art.

Repton’s lack of conspicuous visibility at Sheringham is understandable. While the house he and his son designed is a set piece scene for visitors, it is so only from a distance, and from the outside, and so one of the key views of the design, a wrap around panoramic landscape framed by the bow windows, is not available (Figure 3). Also the house and grounds ensemble cannot be experienced as a through walk, as Repton himself envisaged, the promenade through the house extending outside, through conservatory, kitchen and pleasure

gardens, carrying the impression of cultivation, artifice and taste (Figure 4). The car park and entrance to the property is through one of the estate's former farms, and peripheral woodland.

These circumstances proved creative opportunities, prompting the search for other, perhaps less conventional interpretative possibilities, on the periphery of the park. In his later career, Repton was a pioneering advocate of access to landscape, designing places with both young children and old and disabled people in mind, and also a wider public (Daniels 1999). Sheringham was not designed as a purely personal landscape, a private amenity, for a family and their guests coming to the house; visitors were also allowed into the grounds, away from the house, to enjoy the main view from a temple, of the house and park in its wider coastal and country setting. And this relatively small park, for a local squire, not a multi-propertied, aristocrat, was designed to open up, beyond its property boundaries, to emphasise the owner's social responsibilities to a wider world, including a regard for farming and the decent treatment of estate workers and the wider village poor (Daniels, 1999, Finch, 2013). So while the rationale for this community consciousness in 1812, which Repton articulated in his designs, had a strong element of social management in a time of war and social anxiety, it also anticipated much later movements for public spirited access to landscape, including the founding of National Trust, movements themselves which were not entirely disinterested in their magnanimity, meant to manage popular recreation as well as provide for it.

BARN THEATRE

The site for the installation was the former nineteenth century threshing barn of Wood Farm (9.1 metres by 18.5 metres including shop and office space). This was already used as part of a visitor centre to display information about Repton and items on the Upcher family. In a co-production involving ourselves, property staff and volunteers, and exhibition designers Ugly Studios, we removed much of the existing display and fitted out the barn as a

theatrical space. We took inspiration from Repton's style and the artistry of his approach and his love of theatre and music, including the peep shows and puppet shows, masquerades and scenic pantomimes that were popular two hundred years ago.

Barns in Repton's time came into cultural prominence as farm buildings, featuring as centrepieces in improved agricultural landscapes, and in landscape art, spectacular showpiece, architectural examples on the model farms of large estates, but also more vernacular looking modern buildings, which signified the virtues of good farming at a time of war. While the barn did not feature in Repton's design – indeed it may have been built slightly later – it could convey a message of the view from the house, which included an arable field, patriotically, as well as profitably, ploughed up from the park as part of the war effort, but which is now under pasture (Figure 3).

Barns in Repton's time were places of performance, the seasonal task of threshing sounding out across the landscape, and home to more celebratory occasions of harvest suppers and agricultural shows (Figure 5). Barns were also important for theatrical performances and magic lantern shows. Strolling players “performed chiefly in so-called barn theatres, a simple timber structure often erected next to a local inn, or failing that a standard farmer's barn”, the structures providing “very basic and intimate audience and performance space” (Milling *et al.*, 2004, p.180, Figure 6). Repton wrote a comedy, *Odd Whims; Or Two at a Time*, which was performed in a barn in Aylsham, a few miles from Sheringham, a favourite town where he once lived, with one of the actors entering in a smock as a farmworker as if he had strolled in for work.¹² More permanent barn conversions are key landmarks in the rural landscape now, for galleries, restaurants and private homes, as well as performance spaces.

With creative partners Ugly Studios, skilled in film and animation making, illustration, map making, creative writing, collecting, prop sourcing, set and book design,

musical score composition, furniture making and restoration, lighting, and installation, and the valuable assistance and advice of property staff, we converted the barn at Sheringham to recreate Repton's theatrical vision of landscape. We conceived the building as scenographic viewing chamber, with a series of visual attractions.

The visitor enters the barn through the large double doors now adorned with bright magenta stage 'curtains', the space adorned with hanging banners to create Repton's studio and theatre stalls, whilst 'authentic' stage props feature among other replica, found and made material artefacts on display (Figure 7). The main attraction is a magic lantern style audio-visual show, an animated presentation of the phases of the Sheringham commission as a three act drama, nine minutes in length, the upper limit (we were advised), of the attention span of a casual adult visitor. A specially commissioned and performed musical score for the show used tunes of the time, including patriotic songs and imitations of birdsong, played on the flute, Repton's own instrument.¹³ With the barn doors open, to actual bird song as well as light and air, we managed to allude obliquely to a key feature of Repton's designs, the way they create a zone between interior and exterior space.

Other features included a touch screen version of the Red Book, digital technology effectively reproducing the overlays, inset into an old architectural drawing board as part of a mock up of Repton's studio in Hare Street, Essex. One of the challenges of the Sheringham Red Book in terms of re-presentation is that it is more textual, less pictorial, than many, a mark of its almost scriptural significance, with a series of quotations and allusions, in whole pages of copperplate writing. So not every page was reproduced, some modern text summaries were included, and elsewhere in the installation, particularly the audio-visual presentation, we highlighted key passages.

At child level, two cabinets of curiosities, with real and fabricated specimens associated with the landscape, continued the reveal theme, a slide disclosing the explanatory

text. One cabinet displayed ‘natural treasures’ (a fossil, specimen of heather, oak leaves and pine cone, stage prop turnip, wheat, hare’s foot, and rhododendron), and the other ‘cultural treasures’ (replica hand axe, lead ampoule and ploughman’s buttons, model wind turbine, replica wedding ring and cameos of Abbot and Charlotte Upcher, Victorian seaside postcards, and a toy racing car). In the manner of Repton’s more unsettling juxtapositions of past and present, the inclusion of the wind turbine, under a slide of a 19th century windmill was meant to prompt issues on current landscape development in the light of the past. One of the treasured sea views at Sheringham now is past a windmill, sometimes animated by a passing steam train, run by a local heritage railway (Figure 2). A more equivocal sea view takes in an offshore windfarm, Sheringham Shoal. While respectful of ancient landmarks, Repton’s designs for Sheringham incorporated modern technologies, as windmills in his time still were, and his sea views are animated by ships of various kinds, fishing vessels, coastal craft, ocean going war ships, in what was, in its time, a major, multi-lane highway of communication.

Also at child level we installed a walk around illustrated time line set into a tabletop recycled from the previous display. A series of ten large cut out figures, in the style of a graphic novel, represented characters implicated in a family centred commission, Abbot and Charlotte Upcher, and also Repton and his family, his son and partner John Adey, and his daughter Mary who assisted with preparing the Red Books and acted as travelling nurse for her infirm father (Daniels, 1999). Alongside were characters from the wider world of 1812, inspired by Repton’s design for Sheringham: Napoleon Bonaparte, Ned Ludd (leader of the Luddites), the Prince Regent, Prime Minister Spencer Perceval (assassinated in 1812), and JMW Turner (the star turn at the Royal Academy’s summer exhibition of 1812).

Ugly Studios modelled the plans using Georgian toy theatres as inspiration, and we sustained some of this cardboard style toy world atmosphere within the building. The

installation offered a more colourful, unexpected sense of spectacle than perhaps today's visitors to even heritage landscapes might expect. The vibrant 'Regency' colour scheme was selected from the 21 colour palette of the National Trust brand centre.¹⁴ The first place visitors came to after the car park; it would offer a threshold experience for their experience of the park, itself a natural amphitheatre sculpted by glaciation, which Repton enhanced as a spectacle with his route ways and viewing stations (Coleman, 2009). So this installation would frame a sense of landscape performance, if not a matter of actorly role playing – no costumed staff patrol the grounds, or offer visitors smocks and bonnets. The effect of Repton's design was to stage an informal, domestic, family friendly vision for Sheringham, the Red Book showed Upcher and his family strolling the paths, walking their dogs, as people do so now, whether knowingly or not, performing the past in the present (Figure 8).

The installation had to be resilient, capable of standing up to the elements. The barn doors are open almost every day of the year, leaving the space open to the elements as well as visitors. The security of any object placed inside the barn could not be guaranteed. With loaning original artworks or artefacts out of the question, we largely made our own, or sourced reproductions. It is a mark of success that the original exhibition concepts very closely match the finished exhibition (Figure 9).

Constraints were a key to creativity. To save money on a tight budget, and with the help of National Trust volunteers, we recycled a number of pieces of furniture from the existing display, adapting them to new roles. National Trust staff and volunteers at Sheringham also worked to put new power points and lights into the barn to illuminate our set and power the technical elements, including an all weather data projector, the most expensive piece of kit.

The installation was designed to be temporary, and to make a show of its improvised, illusionistic character, and paper and board craft, rather like a Repton design. Unlike some of

Repton's schemes on the ground, including his own viewing pavilions, it has so far proved resilient and remains in place, now over a year since its opening, and with no plans for its immediate removal. Instead the Trust plans to refresh and replace the various elements in turn. We have maintained our connection to the site and team, taking part in public events including 'Uncovered: The Story of the British Landscape' in September 2013, and follow up work for new web pages. This includes a short video on the Red Book using newly photographed images of the original, further information and images on Repton's career, the Sheringham commission and Repton's connections with other National Trust properties.¹⁵

REPTON IN TRUST

National Trust owns nine properties with a secure, documented Repton attribution, if the nature and extent of his involvement varies, as does the degree to which the design is evident on the ground or presented to the public.¹⁶ While Sheringham offers the most complete conspectus of Repton's work in one place, taken together the properties as a whole sample the social, geographical and stylistic scope of his work over this whole career, from early work at Antony on the Tamar estuary of Devon to later designs at Uppark on the South Downs. Along with properties in other hands they offer the potential to see how Repton's designs are clustered in various regions, and relate to other landscapes, designed and not, as well as to each other. So there is a recognizable trail of Repton commissions, from various times along the Tamar, and Sheringham is part of another identifiably regional network of sites, of various associations of life and work, including nearby Felbrigg (National Trust), Barningham, Sustead and Aylsham. Not only can we discover the range of Repton's work within a short distance, but recover something of the experience of mobility he built into his plans.

We can also appreciate the limits as well as scope of Repton's work, the compromises and disappointments, the competitive instincts intended to conceal the contribution of

professional rivals and the necessary adjustments to the work of other designers or the whims of patrons, the brute facts of the physical environment and the vagaries of natural and social development. So at Wimpole Repton is given his due in interpretation, in reproductions of his plans, but as so often on aristocratic estates, as one of a series of designers, and overshadowed in his physical impact on the place by the work of Capability Brown. Repton offered a series of improvements to Brown's work at Wimpole, designed to bring out its scenic character, but it seems few, if any were implemented (Jackson-Stops, 1991, p.114-118). On the other hand at Ashridge, we can reconstruct a design that has been divided with the partition of the property. Capability Brown's parkland is in the hands of National Trust, while Repton's pleasure grounds are owned by Ashridge College. The partnership between the respective owners, as the gardens are restored, as part of the 1813 bicentenary of Red Book, allows us to see how Repton himself in his designs in part complemented Brown's outward looking plans, and in part provided a departure from them, in a more enclosed series of gardens.

It is by revealing the sometimes difficult relations between successive and sometimes competing plans, and the wider world in which they are made, that we can begin to offer an adequate interpretative account of Georgian landscape design, as we look towards the Bicentenary of Repton's death in 2018. If we can appreciate Sheringham as Repton's masterpiece, his most highly realised, completely authored, work, on paper and on the ground, it is because we can see it alongside his sketchier works, and abandoned plans, for contrasting clients, at other periods, in different parts of the country.

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NOTES

¹ For more details of the Brown tercentenary celebrations see Phibbs (2011) Gregory *et al.*, (2013) and <http://www.capabilitybrown.org/> [accessed January 2014].

² The Parks and Gardens UK website www.parksandgardens.org lists 188 locations with Repton connections but does not specify what, if anything survives, nor if the design was realised in the first place, or indeed often what exactly the connection is. A full inventory of site attributions of the kind being made for Capability Brown in association with tercentenary celebrations (Gregory *et al.*, 2013) still needs to be carried out.

³ Focusing on the British context, Repton's works were first commemorated, alongside a biographical note, in Loudon (1840). Daniels (2004a) has previously documented the 'Repton revival' of the twentieth century, a revival that emerged from a spirit of concern regarding the future of the English country house and landscape park, "Repton was rediscovered as a theorist in Christopher Hussey's *The Picturesque* (1927) and as a designer in accounts of

country houses published in early twentieth-century numbers of *Country Life*. In an article of 1948 Nikolaus Pevsner championed him in the modernist *Architectural Review*". Dorothy Stroud authored the first modern biography, *Humphry Repton* in 1961, published by *Country Life* in which she also documented the condition (frequently poor) of remaining Repton landscapes. In 1976 the Basilisk Press reproduced three Red Books within the four volume *The Red Books of Humphry Repton*. Subsequent initiatives have led to the reproduction of a number of other Red Books, although not of comparable quality (see Repton, 1985, Repton, 1994 and Way, 2011). In America, Andrew Jackson Downing included references to Repton in his *A Treatise on the Theory and Practice of Landscape Gardening Adapted to North America* (1841). Repton was reintroduced to America in the early twentieth century by John Nolan who wrote the introduction for the first American edition of Repton's works (1907) (McClelland, 1998).

⁴ See Rogger (2007) for an index of the Red Books. The prices realised by Repton's Red Books have escalated dramatically in the last twenty years, the *Red Book for Mogenhanger* (1792) reaching a little over £10,000 in 1992, and £74,000 in 2012. Figures from Christies online <http://www.christies.com/lotfinder/books-manuscripts/repton-humphry-red-book-for-mogenhanger-in-2982545-details.aspx?from=searchresults&intObjectID=2982545&sid=4ccc20d0-9897-43e0-a29d-60275e61c888> and <http://www.christies.com/lotfinder/books-manuscripts/repton-humphry-red-books-for-mogenhanger-in-5562166-details.aspx> [accessed January 2014].

⁵ The major exhibition 'Humphry Repton: landscape gardener, 1752–1818' was held at the Sainsbury Centre at the University of East Anglia and the Victoria and Albert Museum, London in 1982–3. This followed the landmark exhibition 'The Destruction of the Country House' at the Victoria and Albert Museum in 1974 that had raised the profile of the 'heritage'

lobby dramatically and had in effect launched historic garden conservation (see Strong, 1974). The curators of ‘Humphry Repton’ were able to draw on the second part of the recently discovered Repton memoir, acquired by the British Library in 1981. Covering the period 1814-1815, the memoir was published in 2005 (Gore and Carter, 2005).

⁶ Interview with Gardens Manager Martin Towsey at Woburn on 6 September 2013.

⁷ Repton’s ‘slides’ became his trademark tool. For more information see Repton (1794, p. xv).

⁸ <http://www.woburn.co.uk/groups/new-for-2010/> and

<http://www.woburnabbey.co.uk/gardens/the-gardens-today/> [accessed January 2014]. In 2011 the gardens at Woburn became a Royal Horticultural Society Partner Garden; in 2012 the team behind the restoration won the Hudson’s Heritage Award for New Commission; and in 2013 they received the Georgian Group Architectural Award for Restoration of a Georgian Garden or Landscape.

⁹ Information from an interview with Martin Towsey at Woburn on 6 September 2013 and correspondence with Keir Davidson. More information relating to the Russell Square restoration can be found at: <http://www.landuse.co.uk/project/russell-square> [accessed January 2014].

¹⁰ <http://www.bl.uk/whatson/exhibitions/georgiansrevealed/index.html> [accessed January 2014].

¹¹ The ‘Repton Walk’ mobile application is available as a free download from:

<https://itunes.apple.com/hk/app/repton-walk/id555987662?mt=8> and

<https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=air.ReptonWalk> [accessed January 2014].

¹² Epilogue, *Norfolk Chronicle*, Saturday 18 August 1786.

¹³ The tracks were: ‘A Pastoral Song’ by Franz Josef Haydn (1732-1809), published in Haydn’s first book of English Canzonettas (1794), ‘A Sailor’s Song’, published in the second

book of Haydn's Canzonettas (1795), 'Rule, Britannia!' by Thomas Augustine Arne (1710-78), and 'The Blackbird' by James Hook (1746-1827), an active and well-known London-based composer who was born in Norwich. The music featured in the installation was researched, selected, arranged, performed and recorded by staff and students of the Department of Music at the University of Nottingham, under the direction of Dr Philip Weller.

¹⁴ The new branding, colour palette and logo were launched in 2009. The colours can be viewed at:

http://brandcentre.nationaltrust.org.uk/downloads/2/NT_brand_standards_2014.pdf [accessed January 2014].

¹⁵ The illustrated articles and video are available at:

<http://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/sheringham-park/history/humphry-repton/> [accessed January 2014]. These resources add to the growing amount of 'digital' Repton now available online.

Digitized versions of the following Red Books are now freely available; Brandsbury

<http://pds.lib.harvard.edu/pds/view/46047458>; Glemham Hall

<http://pds.lib.harvard.edu/pds/view/46047457>; Mosely Hall

<http://pds.lib.harvard.edu/pds/view/46526300>; Shrublands

<http://pds.lib.harvard.edu/pds/view/46047459>; Hatchlands and Ferney Hall

<http://www.themorgan.org/collections/works/repton/>; Stonelands [http://brbl-](http://brbl-dl.library.yale.edu/vufind/Record/3433061)

[dl.library.yale.edu/vufind/Record/3433061](http://brbl-dl.library.yale.edu/vufind/Record/3433061); The Fort near Bristol [http://brbl-](http://brbl-dl.library.yale.edu/vufind/Record/3435734)

[dl.library.yale.edu/vufind/Record/3435734](http://brbl-dl.library.yale.edu/vufind/Record/3435734) and Hill Hall

https://secureweb1.essexcc.gov.uk/seaxpam2012/result_details.aspx?DocID=155757. These

are joined by online versions of Repton's main texts; *Sketches and Hints* (1794)

<http://digital.library.wisc.edu/1711.dl/DLDecArts.ReptonSketches>; *Observations* (1803)

<http://digital.library.wisc.edu/1711.dl/DLDecArts.ReptonObservations>; and *Fragments* (1816) <http://digital.library.wisc.edu/1711.dl/DLDecArts.ReptonFragments> produced by the Digital Library for the Decorative Arts and Material Culture, Wisconsin [all accessed January 2014]. Repton's increasing online presence was previously noted by Richardson (2011).

¹⁶ The nine properties (and the dates of the Red Books) are: Antony (1792), Tatton Park (1792), Attingham (1798), Plas Newydd (1799), Hatchlands (1800), Wimpole (1801), Uppark (1810), Sheringham (1812) and Ashridge (1813).

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