

The English Landscape Garden

Elizabeth Proudman - 14 November 2012

Background Notes



Chiswick House

WAHG

Winchester Art History Group

The English Landscape Garden

It is said that the Landscape Garden is the only art form England has given to the world.

This talk will focus on the period from the death of Queen Anne (1715) until the Regency - from the height of the Grand Tour until the excitement of the plants brought back from exotic places by the plant hunters in the early 19th century.

From classical times poets, philosophers and politicians have also been gardeners, and they have written about their ideas, and it was the same in the new 'Augustan age' of 18th century England.

In 1719 Richard Boyle, Earl of Burlington came home from his Grand Tour with 878 trunks of treasures and many new ideas.

He created a garden at Chiswick with the help of Alexander Pope (1688-1744) and William Kent (1685-1748), and their ideas spread through the country. William Hogarth published his 'Analysis of Beauty' and the serpentine line - the 'S' line of beauty - replaced the straight line for anyone of taste.

Pope had a garden at Twickenham, and Kent's most famous garden still survives at Rousham in Oxfordshire. Understanding the iconography was a sign of your culture!



This is Venus' vale at Rousham

Lord Cobham made perhaps the most famous garden at Stowe. His was a political statement, and Henry Hoare recreated the journey of Aeneas at Stourhead. Charles Hamilton spent so much on his park at Painshill he had to sell before it was finished. His grotto was part of his image of Arcadia

In 1751 a young man called Lancelot Brown (1716-83) began his career at Stowe, and before his death worked on 171 major contracts. He was George III's Royal gardener at Hampton Court. His parks at Croome Court, Blenheim (below), Petworth, Corsham Court, Woburn, Cadland and many others still give evidence of his genius. His skill earned him the nickname 'Capability' Brown.

Horace Walpole in his History of Gardening published in 1780 said of Brown: ***'Such was the effect of his genius that when he was the happiest man, he will be least remembered; so closely did he copy nature that his works will be mistaken.'*** and some of our most beloved natural landscapes today are the result of Brown's work.

His parks enabled the new men to show off to their friends their fine new animals. It was the time we know as the agricultural revolution.

Brown died in 1783, and was succeeded as the most famous landscape gardener by Humphry Repton (1752-1818). In fact Repton was the first to use the term 'landscape gardener'. There was a reaction of course to Brown's gentle parks with their clumps and belts of trees, and their gently undulating landscapes and lakes.

William Gilpin and the Picturesque was the fashion for a while.

In 1822 John Claudius Loudon produced an Encyclopaedia of Gardening and used the term 'gardenesque'. Gardening, he said, must be seen as a work of art. For him a work of art was different. It was about the proper care of exotic plants. The age of the landscape was over.

1731 'Epistle to Burlington' by Alexander Pope

*To build, to plant, whatever you intend,
To rear the column, or the Arch to bend,
To swell the terras, or to sink the Grot,
In all let Nature never be forgot.
But treat the Goddess like a modest fair,
Nor over-dress, nor leave her wholly bare:
Let not each beauty ev'ry where be spy'd
Where half the skill is decently to hide.
He gains all points, who pleasingly confounds,
Suprizes, varies, and conceals the bounds.*

*Consult the Genius of the Place in all;
That tells the waters or to rise, or fall,
Or helps th'ambitious Hill the heav'n to scale,
Or scoops in circling theatres the Vale;
Calls in the Country, catches op'ning glades.
Joins willing woods, and varies shades from shades.
Paints as you plant and as you work designs.*

*Still follow Sense, of every art the soul
Parts answering parts shall slide into a whole
Spontaneous beauties all around advance
Start ev'n from difficulty, strike from chance
Nature shall join you; Time shall make it grow
A work to wonder at - perhaps a STOW.*



Blenheim Palace Grand Bridge

Some reading

- William Kent – Landscape Garden Designer by John Dixon Hunt: -
ISBN 0 302 00600 1 – pub. Zwemmer
- Georgian Gardens – The Reign of Nature by David Jacques -
ISBN 0 7134 3456 2 – pub. Batsford
- Capability Brown and Humphry Repton by Edward Hyams -
ISBN 0 460 03809 5 pub. Dent
- The Genius of the Place – the English Landscape Garden
1620-1820 Ed. John Dixon Hunt and Peter Willis -
ISBN 0 262 58092 6
(This book is a collection of literary references relating to
gardens)



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