

**HUMPHRY REPTON AND HIS FAMILY Correspondence 1805-1816** edited by Heather Falvey (Norfolk Record Society 2020 vol.84 xx+411pp ISBN 978-0-9957736-3-9) £25

This volume from the Norfolk Record Society, edited by Heather Falvey, sees the publication for the first time of the important collection of Repton letters in the Huntington Library in California. Fragments from these have been published and considered before by various garden and landscape historians interested in the work of Humphry Repton, the landscape designer whose works have come to define Regency parks and gardens. Repton has been the subject of detailed recent research in the last few years—2018 was the bicentenary of his death and the publication of this collection is a welcome addition to the recent works published on him, his Red Books and his landscape design practice.

There are 200 letters in the collection, written not only by Repton himself, but also by his wife Mary, his sister Dorothy, and his children—these are the close, gossipy letters of a tight-knit family circle. They cover the period from 1805 to 1816, when Repton's professional reputation was well-established, but also when his children were embarking on their professional lives—many of the letters were written to William Repton, the fourth son, who became a solicitor in the Norfolk market town of Aylsham, where Humphry Repton had close family and professional connections (indeed, it was at Aylsham that he was buried in 1818, with a splendid memorial at the church). Repton and Mary married in 1773 and had sixteen children, but only seven survived to adulthood, all of whom authored letters or postscripts in this collection. Mary's letters to her children, and to her sister-in-law Dorothy Adey (Repton's sister), contain detailed information about local society in both Essex and Norfolk, and tantalising snippets about the material culture and the running of the household in Hare Street.

The letters are valuable in revealing the hidden mechanics of Repton's practice—not the kind of details that would usually appear in the Red Books or in correspondence with his clients. It is clear from the letters that he was often accompanied and assisted by his children—in particular John Adey, who went into partnership with his father from 1800 onwards, but the other sons also went with Repton to meet clients and visit their properties. His daughter Mary travelled with Repton on various site visits and was an accomplished watercolourist. The well-known Red Books were produced for clients, with detailed 'before and after' watercolours of his suggested improvements. The letters do not explicitly state her direct involvement in the production of the Red Books or other pieces of work, but they do make it clear that Mary was a key support to her father during these years. At home, his wife Mary dealt with his correspondence and various other secretarial tasks. This illuminates how Repton's practice as a landscape designer and architect was supported in practical ways by his family, the details of the involvement of his wife and daughters being particularly interesting. By contrast we have few personal details about the ways in which his contemporaries and predecessors, like Lancelot 'Capability' Brown, organised their businesses, or the close involvement of family members in the daily work of being a landscape designer. There are some key details about individual commissions by Repton, particularly smaller estates like Auberries on the Suffolk/Essex border. However, many of his commissions during this period are not dealt with in depth in these letters, instead being detailed in his own publications and in the Red Books and letters held in various estate archives.

The letters were collected by William, the successful solicitor who lived in Aylsham with his aunt and uncle, Dorothy and John Adey. Many of the letters relate to William's activities as a solicitor in a rural county undergoing rapid changes in terms of land drainage and parliamentary enclosure. It is clear that he was directly involved as a solicitor in various parishes where parliamentary enclosure was taking place, including Sheringham in 1809. One of Repton's best-known, and best-surviving commissions was at Sheringham Park in 1812. The letters also contain numerous references to local landowners, clergy and other professionals which are invaluable to anyone interested in the history of Norfolk, and of Aylsham, in the early nineteenth century. The Repton family also took a keen interest in contemporary political events, and of course the ongoing wars with France—the letters share snippets of news about current events and political figures. Many of these letters were written by Humphry Repton junior, known to the family as Duff, who was an official in the Audit Office in London

and who seems to have been relatively well-connected. George Stanley Repton, who became a successful architect, was also in London and his letters to the family are similar, full of details about his clients and political news.

Falvey's accessible and scholarly introduction places the letters within a broad historical context, outlining the biographies of Repton and his immediate family in detail, and correcting various errors and assumptions which have crept into accounts of the family, and of Repton's children in particular. The letters are arranged chronologically, rather than the order in which they have ended up in the Huntington Library. This has included some skilful detective work to establish the likely date of some of the letters, some of which had been mis-catalogued when the letters were acquired by the Huntington in the 1970s (an appendix lists each letter by the Huntington Library reference and the identifying number in this book). This arrangement also emphasises the multi-authored nature of many of the letters—various members of the family added postscripts, often quite lengthy. There is a detailed note on the transcription of the letters, which preserves the original spelling and punctuation, and the editorial conventions are clear and consistent. Three lengthy and detailed footnotes—the result of Falvey's exhaustive research into the people, places and events mentioned in the letters—are particularly useful for establishing the family's connections with local society in Norfolk and Essex. Three separate indexes are especially clear and helpful (of people, places and subjects).

This collection is a vital one, not just for those interested in Repton as a designer, but for anyone interested in the early nineteenth-century history of Norfolk and Essex. In tone, scope and interest these letters are reminiscent of those of the Austen family in shining a light on a close, well-connected Georgian family. As well as containing a wealth of detail about local society they are also an entertaining and lively collection.

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**JOHANNES KIP The Gloucestershire Engravings** edited by Anthea Turner (Hobnob Press 2021 174pp ISBN 978-1-906978-99-0) £20

It would be interesting to know the reaction of the Dutch engraver Johannes Kip, when Sir Robert Atkyns commissioned him to produce the engravings for his book *The Ancient and Present State of Glostershire*, published posthumously in 1712. Was Kip delighted to have work for a considerable number of years—this huge undertaking was carried out between 1707 and 1710? Or was he dismayed when he discovered that Atkyns expected him to collect payment for his work directly from the owners? The tercentenary of Kip's death fell in 2021, the perfect time to recognise the ability of a man whose observations and skill provided a legacy of over sixty engravings of Gloucestershire 'seats' as well as three of the city of Gloucester. The unique collection, drawn as bird's-eye views, includes not only the prestigious houses of the great and the good but also the surrounding countryside with its villages and churches.

The book begins with a county map which shows the sites of the engravings (plus Badminton, drawn by Leonard Knyff); the key is in alphabetical order by parish, as are the engravings. The introduction, which is helpfully referenced, explores Kip's life and work. Many will be familiar with the 1707 book *Britannia Illustrata* (drawn by Knyff and engraved by Kip), a collaborative collection of eighty views of the houses of noblemen and gentlemen. However, Kip's subsequent career as an artist and engraver, and this particular collection of engravings for Gloucestershire, are less well known. By 1707 Knyff had left the country and Kip was the leading topographical illustrator in England. Perhaps Kip's reputation influenced Atkyns to commission him to carry out the work. Including his work would have been regarded as prestigious, and he moved in circles where he was able to persuade owners to have their houses included.

The majority of this book is devoted to the gazetteer of engravings with explanatory text: there are 65 of these, as well as vignettes of particular details, and 32 illustrations in colour. Each A4-sized image, with the useful addition of an arrow indicating north, is accompanied by a title,