

Appendix 2

**Catton Park: a brief report on the historic landscape and its
significance**

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1. The Principal Documentary Sources for the History of the Site.

Catton Park is a site of some importance in art-historical terms as Humphry Repton's first paid commission. His client was Jeremiah Ives, a prominent Norwich merchant: Repton worked on the site in 1788-9, and again in 1790. But the extent of his involvement, and the early history of the site in general, are both poorly documented. There are no early maps of the site, and no Red Book: the site is mentioned in his account books (NRO MS10 T131B) and two water colour paintings of Repton's designs for the park survive (Castle Museum). Repton also refers briefly to the site in a discussion of park entrances in his *Observations on the Theory and Practice of Landscape Gardening*, published in 1803. Much of the area occupied by the park is shown on an estate map of 1748 which survives only in the form of two later copies, of 1780 and c.1800: NRO Church Commissioners' Map 11911, and NRO DS45 (103) Cabinet II, respectively. In addition, there are a number of road closure orders, most notably one of 1778, which are related to the history of the park (NRO C/Sce 1 Road Order Book 1, 25). The site is shown, rather schematically, on William Faden's county survey of 1797, and on the draft Ordnance Survey drawings of c.1816; but the first detailed surveys date to the nineteenth century. The 1843 Tithe Award Map (NRO DS50 290) shows the basic layout of the park and of the plantations associated with it; while the Sales Catalogue of 1852 contains a more detailed map and a number of useful illustrations. The first really detailed plan of the site, however, is the First Edition OS 6" of 1884. There are a number of less important or secondary sources, which are referred to in passing below.

2. The Existing Structure of the Site

Catton Park survives in degraded condition and in divided ownership. Most of the park is under the plough and comparatively few free-standing parkland trees remain. The northern section of the park – including much of the pleasure grounds – has been encroached upon by housing, and various intrusions into the outer belts have been made elsewhere, including (to the south east of the hall) a school and associated grounds. The park is surrounded on almost all sides by the suburbs of north Norwich. The hall sits towards the northern edge of the park, on rising ground: the main surviving features of the designed landscape are:

- Limited areas of relict pleasure grounds, including some eighteenth-century planting, in the area to the north of the hall.
- Remains of nineteenth-century gardens to the south of the hall.
- A western belt, of mid nineteenth-century date.
- A southern and south eastern belt, of late eighteenth-century date,
- Residual parkland planting, mainly featuring oak and Wellingtonia.
- A southern entrance, with gates and lodge house, of nineteenth-century date: the approach drive, running north-south through the length of the park, survives in part as a rough track.
- Just outside the park, to the north east and now surrounded by modern housing, is a picturesque cottage of late eighteenth century date which originally stood close to an entrance leading in from the village street, which was removed in the nineteenth century.
- Outside the park across the public road to the east, an area of ornamental pasture called the Deer Park formed a visual extension of the park landscape.

3.The Evolution of the Site

As already noted, Catton was Repton's first paid commission and his account books show that he began work here in September 1788. The first four days of activity recorded included an initial conversation with Mr Ives, the owner; a couple of days spent with the surveyor, Mr North of Aylsham; and a day with Ives and one 'Wilkin', possibly Repton's architect friend William Wilkin, the probable architect of the Hall. In November, Repton returned, first to speak to Ives and then to spend a day 'by myself making and staking all the work'. Repton also charged for work done at home including 'mapping and contriving' and 'altering the maps by Mr Ives' desire and making working drawings of the sections of the Ha Ha etc.'. Most of the planning was completed by the beginning of 1789. Repton charged for two further days in 1790 but the loss of the subsequent ledger makes it difficult to say when he ceased working at Catton.

Earlier discussions of the history of Catton Park have generally assumed that Repton's landscaping work was carried out to accompany a new house on a virgin site, the precise location of which may even have been decided by Repton himself; and that no park existed here before this date. Any surviving eighteenth-century landscaping here could, therefore, be attributed with some certainty to Repton. But the evidence for these assumptions is, at best, ambiguous and it is possible that the paucity of contemporary sources has allowed the simplification of a more complex story.

Catton Park is first shown, schematically, on William Faden's 1797 county map, where it appears as a small park of c.18 hectares, with the hall standing towards its northern perimeter. The hall is shown in elevation, with a drive running in from the west, leading off the north-south road leading from Catton to Norwich. The southern side of the park is shown as belted. The only earlier map of relevance is an estate survey of 1748, which shows that the area later occupied by the park then consisted of enclosed fields, with some areas of residual open-field arable. Of particular interest is the fact that the road leading from Norwich to Catton at this time followed a line more to the east of the course shown on Faden's map: it was diverted westwards by a Road Closure Order of 1778 (NRO C/Sce1 Road Order Box 1, 25). This diversion is itself a suggestion that some measure of landscaping was already being carried out at the site more than a decade before Repton's involvement. But even more striking is the fact that the map accompanying the Road Order shows elaborate entrance gates positioned on the line of the *old* road – strongly indicating that a house of some pretensions already existed around the site of Catton Hall even before this date.

The history of the present Catton Hall, and its early owners, is of some importance here. As already noted Repton's client was one Jeremiah Ives, a member of one of Norwich's leading merchant families. His father, grandfather, great uncle and cousin all served as mayors of the City. Ives choice of Catton as a place of residence followed an established trend: the village and its environs were becoming, in effect, an elite residential suburb of the city. The historian Armstrong described it in 1781 as:

A very pleasant village, and the residence of many opulent manufacturers, who have retired from Norwich, and built elegant houses. The air is reckoned very healthful, and many invalids resort thither for the benefit of it. It is distant from the City a mile and a half north and extends beyond the two mile stone. The late Robert Roger, esq. and Robert Harvey, esq. both Aldermen of Norwich, have erected handsome seats in this village; as also Jeremiah Ives Harvey, esq. and Mr Suffield.

Robert Harvey was Jeremiah Ives' brother-in-law and Jeremiah Ives Harvey his nephew; but Ives had other connections with the parish, before he took up residence there. He married Frances Buckle,

whose father (Charles Buckle, the High Steward of Norwich) and brother (also Charles Buckle) both lived in Catton. Ives himself does not seem to have purchased the land in Catton until 1788 (NRO DCN 65/66 - 75), and was probably not resident there until after this date: when he served as Mayor for the city in 1785 he gave his address as 26 Tombland, and at all elections in the 1780s voted in Norwich. If Catton Hall had indeed been erected *before* the late 1780s, as the evidence of the 1778 Road Closure map strongly suggests, then it can hardly have been built for him: and in this context it is noteworthy that the diversion was evidently carried out for the benefit of 'Mr Buckle', and that the entrance gates shown, and the property they gave access to, were therefore presumably his. Architectural historians generally agree that the house was erected 'around 1780'. All these arguments together suggest that Catton Hall was originally built by Charles Buckle, rather than by Ives, probably in the 1770s; that some kind of ornamental landscape existed around it by 1778, and that this was extended to the west, following the road closure order, after this date; and that Ives acquired the property, perhaps by inheritance, in the late 1780s and called in Repton to carry out further landscaping.

There is, therefore, a strong suggestion that a large house – presumably with ornamental grounds – existed here before Repton's involvement in 1788. Looked at in this light, it is possible to re-interpret the evidence of Faden's map of 1797. Firstly, the one change for which Repton was undoubtedly responsible – he informs us about it himself, in his 1803 book *Observations on the Theory and Practice of Landscape Gardening* – was a new entrance leading in to the park from the north east, from Catton High Street. Yet Faden's map does not show this entrance: instead it shows a drive leading in from the *west*, off the Norwich-Catton road (presumably an extension of the pre-1778 entrance drive, made after the park had been extended in this direction: this drive continued to exist into the nineteenth century). Faden's map was surveyed around 1794 and it is possible that Repton's new eastern drive had not, in fact, been put in place by this time. Secondly – and bearing in mind the probable date of Faden's survey – attention might be drawn to the belt of trees shown running around the southern edge of the park. If these had indeed been established by Repton it is unlikely that they were more than four or five years old when the map was surveyed: while it is possible that Faden's surveyors would depict an area of such recent planting as a wood, it is perhaps more likely that the belts had been planted earlier, in the 1770s.

A further road diversion occurred in 1789 (NRO C/Sce1 Road Order Book 3, 298 - 9). This unfortunately lacks a map, and the description of the highway effected ('highway leading from Norwich, lying between the lands of Jeremiah Ives on each side') is ambiguous. While it may signal the start of work on the park it may relate to the area well outside the park: Ives certainly closed a footpath in the area north of the village of Catton in 1798, well outside the area of the park (NRO C/Sce1 Road Order Book 5, 247-8).

Much of the structure of Catton Park can be ascribed to the later eighteenth century: but how much was the work of Humphry Repton is much less clear. Much of Repton's work, especially in the early stages of his career, was restricted to relatively limited interventions, restricted to pleasure grounds (as at probably at Buckenham Tofts or Holkham in Norfolk) or entrances (as at Hanworth, where his account book refers to 'staking towards kitchen garden' in 1789 and to 'staking new approach' in 1790). It is quite possible, therefore, that Repton's involvement at Catton was rather more limited than has sometimes been assumed, perhaps restricted to improving the area around the house (as the references to the proposed ha ha may indicate), the eastern entrance drive with associated 'picturesque' cottage, and some additional planting in the park.

But we should also note that some of the more important elements in the present landscape are of mid-late nineteenth century, rather than eighteenth-century date. Ives died in 1820 but his widow continued to reside in the hall until 1835, when she offered the estate for sale. It was bought by Captain George Morse, a prominent Norwich brewer, who died in 1852. Catton was put on the market again, the particulars describing it as a 'Valuable and important property' and mentioning an attached 'cottage or nee residence', presumably the ornamental cottage which still survives just outside the park's north eastern boundary. The estate was acquired by the banker J.H. Gurney and, from the mid 1850s, the park was altered in a number of ways. It was expanded to the west, following a Road Order of 1856 which diverted the Norwich-Catton road further to the west, and a new belt was planted here, incorporating a number of clumps and plantations which had been planted, perhaps by Repton, in the fields to the west of the park (NRO C/Sce1 Road Order Box 20, 3). The original perimeter belt, isolated within the park, was drastically thinned but is still visible as a line of trees running through the park. Equally important was the creation of a new drive running north-south through the centre of the park and, presumably at the same time, the abandonment of the old western and north eastern drives. There were a number of other minor alterations: much new planting was made within the park, including the prominent Wellingtonia which today dominate many of the views; a slight northern extension was made to the eastern belt; a new formal garden was created to the south of the house; and major alterations effected to the kitchen garden. Like most designed landscapes, Catton is a multi-period palimpsest, rather than being the work of one period, or one designer.

4. The Design of the Late Eighteenth-Century Park

It will be apparent from the above discussion that it is difficult to assess the extent to which the design of the late eighteenth-century landscape at Catton can be attributed to Humphry Repton. We can, however, assess the way that the eighteenth-century design functioned, and – more tentatively – compare this with other sites for which Repton was responsible. Both Faden's map, and (more accurately) the OS draft surveyor's drawings of c.1816, show that the park was enclosed on the south and south east by a thick belt of trees. There was also a thinner, intermittent belt running along much of the western boundary beside the diverted Norwich-Catton (St Faiths) Road. The surviving trees suggest that the belt planting was dominated by beech, oak and sweet chestnut, with scattered examples of sycamore, some apparently coppiced or pollarded at a low level. The house was, as already noted, located on high ground at the extreme north of the park, and there were extensive views southwards, towards the city, which included the cathedral spire - this can be seen in Repton's watercolour of the park. The south eastern belts served to screen the houses built along Oak Lane (the road forming the eastern boundary of the park) but further north, where there were no houses, the views out of the park were left open, towards the area later known as the Deer Park. It is probable that this area was planted up in an aesthetic manner, perhaps by Repton - one of the beeches surviving here appears to be of similar age to those in the parkland belt. Other areas, in particular land to the west of St Faiths Road, may also have been planted at this time: although Ives did not own a landed estate in the usual sense of the word, he owned a number of parcels of land in the parish and the design appears to have been intended to make his possessions appear more extensive than they really were.

The interior of the park made extensive use of existing timber - following normal eighteenth-century practice, existing hedges were removed but the more prominent hedgerow trees were retained. Several of these oak pollards still survive, growing in lines within the park.

The sale catalogue of 1852, with attached maps and illustrations, provides the first detailed representation of Catton park (NRO DS24 (290) Cabinet II). The map shows a number of features to the north and west of the hall, including a kitchen garden and a well-wooded pleasure ground

through which a winding path ran to the parish church. The illustrations show that the tower of the church was visible from this pleasure ground, framed by trees – a Reptonian touch. The area around the front of the hall appears in these drawings to be separated from the main park by a metal park pale fence: there is no evidence that the ha ha mentioned in Repton's accounts was ever constructed. There were still two principal drives leading to the hall: one from the south west, one from the north east. A thick belt of shrubbery/woodland ran along the north side of the latter drive screening the view of the Home Farm from the park. This drive was typically Repton; it left the public road beside a group of cottages, running in a smooth curve to the hall. The importance of such a village entry was emphasised by Repton in his *Observations on the Theory and Practice of Landscape Gardening*.

The real importance of a place might be distinguished by the number of cottages, or rather, substantial houses, appropriate to the residence of those belonging to the place; this would truly enrich the entrance of every park ... Various specimens of this attention may be seen in the roads near the following places ... CATTON ... (Loudon 1840, 249).

A cottage (now called Holiday House) which beautified the entrance - a 'picturesque' thatched structure - was probably designed by Repton himself: it may have functioned as a lodge, although the map evidence is ambiguous on this point. Repton's watercolours suggest that it was also intended to be visible as a decorative feature from within the park.

5. The Significance of Catton Park.

The main significance of Catton Park lies in its status as Repton's first paid commission. Repton himself had a particular association with Norfolk, and especially with north east Norfolk. He was born in the town of Bury St Edmunds in Suffolk but moved to Norwich with his parents in 1762 at the age of ten (Stroud 1962): his father was a collector of excise, his mother the daughter of a minor Suffolk squire. In 1764 he was sent to Holland to learn Dutch, probably to prepare him for a career in the Norwich textile industry. Certainly, on his return at the age of sixteen he was apprenticed to a city textile merchant, and later set up in business on his own account, with the financial support of his father. But on his parents' death he inherited enough money to give up this career, and settled on a small property in Sustead in north east Norfolk, not far from Aylsham, where he farmed on a small scale and spent his time reading and sketching. Some of his drawings appeared as engravings in *Armstrong's History and Antiquities of the County of Norfolk* of 1781, a work for which Repton himself wrote the sections on the hundreds of North and South Erpingham. He was on intimate terms with William Windham of nearby Felbrigg Hall, whom he accompanied to Ireland as private secretary, and whom he helped in his political career (Daniels 1982).

In 1786 Repton left Norfolk and moved to Hare Street in Essex, he and his family now living in more straightened circumstances. It was here, in 1788, that he decided to take up the career of landscape gardener, consciously identifying himself as Brown's successor: Catton was his first paid commission, but his career rapidly took off and by 1795 he had worked on more than 50 commissions, and by the end of his career he claimed to have 'improved' more than four hundred properties (Daniels and Seymour 1990, 497). Several of these were in Norfolk, including Barningham, Catton, Holkham, Hanworth, Honing, Hoveton, Wood Hall Hilgay, and Sheringham (as well as Buckenham Tofts, Felbrigg, Hoveton House and Gunton, where his involvement seems to have been more limited).

Repton's style differed in a number of important ways from that of Capability Brown: but it is a moot point how far the new emphases and elements were shared with other contemporary designers, and were in reality part of a more general shift in taste in the late eighteenth century for which Repton, as a prolific writer on landscape design, has received more than his fair share of credit. As we have seen,

the extent of Repton's involvement at Catton is uncertain, and there is thus a danger of ascribing to Repton features and practices which may have been common currency at the time, especially in the design of smaller landscapes. Repton's early writings and designs are characterised by a strong, almost obsessive interest in a making parks seem larger than they really were, and in advertising to the greatest advantage the extent of a client's ownership: Repton was keenly aware of what we might call the public image of a place, and especially of the impact that first impressions of it might have on visitors. But such interests must have been more widely shared at a time when increasing numbers of parks were being created by relatively minor landowners –like Ives. Nevertheless, Catton *is* a striking example of the arrangement of belts and views to maximise the apparent extent of the owner's possessions: the house situated at the extreme north of the park, to maximise the extent of the view from the warm, south facing rooms; and the carefully structured views through the belts across the areas which Ives owned. Because the hall lay close to the northern edge of the park, the houses of the village (which Ives did not own) lay little more than 200 metres away. Dense planting was therefore established, in order to screen them from view, although - to judge from an illustration in the sale catalogue of 1852 - the tower of the parish church, romantically clad with ivy, was clearly visible from the pleasure ground, picturesquely framed by trees. The principal drive approached the hall from the north east, and views of the park were largely obscured by careful planting until the hall - and thus the most extensive prospects southwards across the park - was reached.

Above all, the entrance arrangements at Catton, described by Repton in *Observations*, are a good example of the practice which, a few years later, he came to refer to as 'appropriation'; that is, the idea that the status of the landowner did not arise simply from the possession of an extensive park, but rather from the visual signs of his or her ownership more generally spread throughout the area of an estate. 'The first essential of greatness in a place, is the appearance of united and uninterrupted property' (Goode 1982, 34): and the relation of Ives' entrance to the village street would have given the mistaken impression that he was the squire and the village his property. But other elements of the design – whether created by Repton, or otherwise – had a different significance. In particular, the gap in the belt to the south – shown in Repton's watercolours of the site - allowed views towards the nearby city which included the cathedral spire: this may have had a simple aesthetic function, but symbolically it associated Ives' residence with the city, the source of his wealth.

6. Catton Park: design elements of particular significance.

It will be apparent from the above discussion that we cannot simply describe Catton as a 'Repton park': much of what we see here today dates from the period after Repton and much of the eighteenth-century design may, in fact, pre-date Repton's involvement. Moreover, the landscape is in poor condition, and much of the detailed fabric has been lost. The park is now in divided ownership and mainly under the plough, there are relatively few free-standing parkland trees, and the belts are over mature in places. The most important features of the design are:

- (i) **The overall arrangement of space within the park:** with the house situated on the highest ground close to the northern boundary, and the parkland extending away, downslope, to south and east. Both the eighteenth and the nineteenth-century designs were strongly framed by belts to the east and west – belts which now serve to obscure the surrounding suburbs of north Norwich. These belts are the most prominent feature in the design today, although more continuous and enclosing – especially towards the south – than in the original, late eighteenth-century design.
- (ii) **The south eastern belt.** This is still largely intact: the original planting consists of oak, beech, and sweet chestnut, with some sycamore, but there is much later sycamore and lime, and some Scots pine and beech, along the park edge. This belt may have been planted by Repton but, as argued above, is probably slightly earlier in date.

- (iii) **The western belt.** As noted above, the park was extended to the west in the second half of the nineteenth century: the new belt established at that time is a fine and complex piece of planting featuring a mixture of deciduous and exotic trees with box, holly, cedars (Lebanon and Atlas) and yew especially prominent (the line of the old, late eighteenth-century belt can still be picked out as a loose band of oak and beech running through the park). The edge of the belt is carefully scalloped, the projections each marked by a cedar under planted with yew: very classy.
- (iv) **The carefully contrived view eastwards, out of the park and into the area now known as the Deer Park.** This is a crucial element in the original design and very 'Reptonian' in character.
- (v) **The views of the thatched 'picturesque' cottage which stood close to the entrance created by Repton.** The cottage was probably designed by Repton (it is very much in his style) and was supposed to be viewed from within the park, as well as ornamenting the entrance when viewed from the road.
- (vi) To the north of the house **fragments of pleasure-ground planting** survive amidst later planting and features: a scatter of yews and sweet chestnuts with girths of 4.5 and 4.8 metres. Two pre-park pollarded oaks are also present here, with girths of 5.6 and 6 metres. Given that Repton was particularly involved in the design of pleasure grounds (and, later, formal gardens) it is quite possible that some of this planting was by him.
- (vii) **The remaining free-standing timber within the park** comprises, for the most part, *either* pre-park hedgerow trees, retained when the park was laid out; *or* the remains of the old eighteenth-century belt, thinned but retained when the park was expanded in the nineteenth century. Wellingtonia are a prominent feature, perhaps too prominent: they tend to give the park a rather Victorian feel, at odds with the architecture of the house, and the landscape's eighteenth-century origins: those standing in the open parkland could arguably be felled.