

7.

The Return to Formality

William's training at the Royal Military Academy meant that he was a practical man in many ways. However, he also sought inspiration from the ideals of the Renaissance, which had occupied the minds of artists, philosophers, writers and scholars for generations. Specifically, he was inspired by classical horticultural concepts that had originated in the hillside gardens of Imperial Rome, where paths and avenues were aligned with the windows and doors of the main façade of the villa, with long vistas leading to a piece of statuary as a focal point. These principles had been adopted by the fifteenth-century Italian architect and humanist scholar Leon Battista Alberti (1404-1472). Alberti maintained that beauty came from a harmony of all the parts of the whole. In his Treatise *De Re Aedificatoria Libra*, book five, written in 1452, he wrote that gardens should occupy the foreground overlooking the owner's land, but they should also take in the hills and mountains beyond. The concept of leading the eye towards the middle and distant landscape became central to William's landscape design principles and enabled him to reconcile strictly formal pleasure grounds in the immediate area around the house with the landscape beyond. Although picturesque landscapes were his first love, and he was always concerned to include them in his designs as the social and economic changes in England in the nineteenth century led to a gradual return to formality in the garden. It was his formal gardens, and especially French seventeenth-century *parterre-de-broderie*, which his clients wanted, with their associations with power, control and order. In order to appreciate the reasons underlying the move away from the English Landscape School associated with Lancelot Brown and his followers, an understanding of social change is important. Although social historians have noted that the real challenges to the power of the landed classes did not take place until after the First World War of 1914-1918, changes were being felt long before that date. As early as the 1830s the pace of life William would have known as a boy and young man was disappearing. Ian Anstruther has described how the changes brought about by the power of steam led to a revolution in travel, reflecting that: 'the homely plod of

hoof and sail and the ancient limits of a day's journey started to crumble and disappear.¹ Old social certainties were also crumbling, leading to a growing nostalgia amongst the old landed classes for the paternalistic, hierarchical system of society which had been in place for generations and a way of life they would have considered to be strictly English. Elite attitudes to industrialisation were somewhat confused for, aligned to their dislike for the growing industrial towns, where dirt and squalor were inevitably the result of overcrowding and unsanitary conditions, there was a fascination with the new innovations that industry brought. Some landowners undoubtedly benefited from these changes as, for example, valuable minerals were discovered on their land, and their commercial investments in industry flourished. These were conundrums which they endeavoured to mitigate by metaphorically 'pulling up their drawbridges' as they sought to reconcile themselves to events which, they perceived, could damage their power bases as landowning oligarchs at the apex of society. The struggle between the aristocracy, a growing middle class and the working class in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries has been described as a 'friction of interests.'² The changes which led to this 'friction of interests' were complex and protracted, but ultimately they were to seriously challenge the position of the landed elites.

To counter social instability, various elites proposed reinforcing the bond between master and man as the country gradually shifted from a rural to an industrial nation. This solution, combined with an attachment to the rural scenery of the British Isles, was the philosophy not only of Sir Uvedale Price, but the statesman Edmund Burke (1728-1787) and the writer on picturesque scenery, the Revd William Gilpin. They considered that a contented workforce was less likely to revolt, as it had in France. For both Price and Gilpin, absentee landlords were a threat to the welfare of the people and social stability, and: 'the ancient country seats of the nobility have an essential part to play in the landscape of dignified images that sustained tradition, property and the capacity for self-respect, grace and manners, taste and elegance.'³

From his vicarage at Boldre in Hampshire, the Revd Gilpin wrote a series of articles and sermons that demonstrated that he regarded the ownership of land as a trust, and the landowner as a central and unifying figure in the small community of servants, tenants and labourers. The landowners' role was to protect his 'inferiors' and secure their comfort in a life which would be spent on his estate, spending his income to improve and maintain that estate for the benefit not only of himself and his dependents but also for the comfort of his employees. Neither Price, Burke nor Gilpin could have had any knowledge of how the growth of the industrial towns would divide man from master, but their conviction that the whole system of society would change once men were divorced from their roots proved to be correct.

1 Ian Anstruther, *The Knight and the Umbrella* (Geoffrey Bles, 1963), p.3.

2 Eric Evans, *The Forging of the Modern State: Early Industrial Britain 1783-1870* (Longmans, 1989), p. 171.

3 Nigel Everett, *The Tory View of Landscape* (New Haven and London, Yale University Press 1994), p. 101.

England was ruled from 1760 to 1820 by George III (1738-1820), a monarch who, it has been said, ‘instinctively revered ancient institutions, above all the Church and the monarchy. He disliked and distrusted change.’¹ These were views that would have automatically endeared him to the aristocracy and gentry. William had been born into this Georgian society and his family background ensured that he was very much part of the paternalistic system, the standards of which were advocated by Gilpin, Burke and Price. A patriotic zeal for king and country was the predominant ethos of his childhood, whilst he was pursuing his classical studies at Winchester and the grammar school in Bury St Edmunds, and the French Revolution was still uppermost in the memories of the landed class. The Napoleonic wars still had a decade to run. It was this patriotic atmosphere that contributed to his decision to give up the idea of following his father and paternal grandfather into the Church and join the army instead. His patriotism was re-ignited when he returned to the quiet backwater of Brancepeth in 1818, fuelled by dreams of Britain’s romantic past.

The ideal of romantic past was to play a defining role in the nineteenth century, and its relevance to William’s philosophy can be discerned in the remarks he made to Lord North of Wroxton Abbey in Oxfordshire. At Wroxton the old abbey buildings had been rebuilt in the reign of Henry VIII, but nothing remained of the Tudor garden, something he was anxious to rectify, as he explained to Lord North:

For many years having studied our old English architecture I cannot help expressing a patriotic veneration for it (if I may use the term) & am therefore naturally zealous in rescuing places really worthy of restoration from their debased condition.²

A property he would have been familiar with was Harlaxton Manor in Lincolnshire, the estate of Gregory Gregory (1786-1854). Between 1831 and 1837, Salvin was commissioned to improve the house in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth-century style. The work was one of Salvin’s most impressive undertakings, and William must have gained much inspiration from the grounds at Harlaxton at a time when he was considering taking up landscape gardening. The grandeur of the gardens was recorded in four watercolour perspectives produced by Salvin’s office in 1834. They were reported on by John Claudius Loudon in his *Gardener’s Magazine*, after a visit he made to the property whilst on a tour of Staffordshire and Lincolnshire in May 1840. Loudon wrote: ‘The terraced gardens will be on seven different levels, communicated by flights of steps, ornamented with vases, figures and numerous other suitable objects, and in appropriate places, there will be canals, basins, and fountains, summer-houses, shrubs clipped into

1 Mark Girouard, *The Return to Camelot: Chivalry and the English Gentleman* (Yale University Press, 1981), p. 22.

2 Plans and drawings, eighteenth-nineteenth centuries, including (fols. 1-100) plans by W.A. Nesfield for the gardens at Wroxton, Oxon., with a letter from him to J.S. North, 1846 (dated 6 March ’46 and addressed from Eton Coll., Windsor). MS. North a 17[R] fols 1-2. Bodleian Libraries, University of Oxford.

artificial forms, &c.¹ However, although the rich decoration and four-way perspective associated with the Jacobean period were central to William's overall designs, he was not averse to mixing a number of historical styles, including elements from English Tudor. On at least two estates he included a maze, popular in the Tudor period, both of which still exist at Somerleyton Hall in Suffolk and Worden Hall in Lancashire.

He incorporated ornamentation from the reign of Henry VIII, and in particular the heraldic devices of the Earls of Scarborough who owned Lumley Castle in County Durham, on whose estate he had been born, and where his father was perpetual curate in nearby Chester-le-Street. He would presumably, therefore, have known of the great pride the Earls of Scarborough took in their lineage. Lumley Castle contained sculpture, inscriptions and heraldic devices, 'lauding the family and its achievements over the centuries.'² Their ancestor, John, Lord Lumley, had inherited Henry VIII's great Tudor palace of Nonsuch in 1578, from his father-in-law Henry FitzAlan, 12th Earl of Arundel. John's main obsession was his family's genealogy, and under his auspices Lumley Castle was gradually transformed into a shrine devoted to the family's achievements.³ The Lumley Inventory of 1590 survives in the possession of his descendants. It is a unique document listing not only the contents of his collections and containing his pedigree, but also including watercolours of the furniture, tombs and sculpture he had commissioned.⁴ In the gardens at Nonsuch he replaced Henry VIII's heraldry with his own, which included two marble columns flanking a central fountain. The columns were referred to in 1650 as 'the Fawlcøn perches', a misreading of the Lumley popinjays.⁵ There is a drawing in the Lumley collection which matches this description exactly, and although there is no evidence that William ever saw this drawing, his interest in this type of historical detail is apparent on at least one estate where he designed a similar device on a gateway. The heraldic symbols, monograms and family crests that were prevalent in the Elizabethan period in England were devices that had also been used in France to announce 'the status of the owner from at least the beginning of the sixteenth century.'⁶ One example was at Anet, where in 1547 Diane du Poitiers had a large DH emblazoned on the *parterre*.

William also incorporated monograms in a number of his *parterres-de-broderie*; examples can be found at Stoke Rochford in Lincolnshire, Brodick on the Isle-of-Arran, Drayton House in Northamptonshire, Alton Towers in Staffordshire and Eaton Hall in Cheshire. There are sundials at Crewe Hall in Cheshire, Stoke Edith

1 Priscilla Boniface, ed., *In Search of English Gardens: The Travels of John Claudius Loudon and his Wife Jane* (Guild Publishing, 1987), pp. 189-202.

2 Roy Strong, *The Renaissance Garden in England* (Thames & Hudson, London, 1998), p. 63.

3 John, Lord Lumley devoted his time to his family genealogy after being excluded from office and court life as a result of his involvement in the Ridolfi Plot to assassinate Elizabeth I.

4 Roy Strong, *The Renaissance Garden in England* (Thames & Hudson, London, 1998), p. 64

5 *Ibid.*

6 Kenneth Woodbridge, *Princely Gardens: The Origins and Development of the French Formal Style* (Thames & Hudson, 1986), p. 197.

in Herefordshire and Stoneleigh Abbey in Warwickshire. William referred to the engravings of country seats in the 1707 *Britannia illustrata*, a publication that contained over seventy-seven bird's-eye views, drawn over a period of eight years by Leonard Knyff (1650-1722) and then engraved on copper by Johannes Kip (1653-1722) for inspiration.¹ He also studied the garden statuary from a Dutch publication of 1730, the translation of which reads: 'Jewels of Parks Existing in many kinds of dry and wet bowls, *parterres*, lawns and fountains to serve all lovers of country estates, Henrik and Daniel Van Damme'. Evergreens were important features around a *parterre*, and box was used to edge the plant-like shapes within the *parterre* itself, as well as to edge the perimeter of the whole *parterre*.



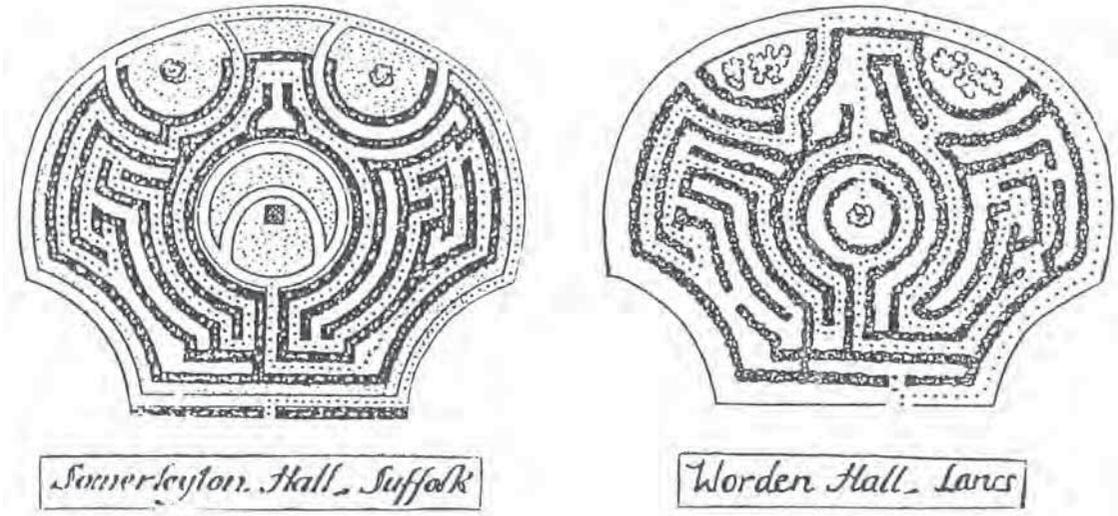
Parterre design for Stoke Edith, Herefordshire.

Clipped box was known to have been used in Roman gardens, although John Parkinson (1567-1650), in his *Paradisi in Sole Paradisus Terrestris* of 1629, said that in England at the time of writing box was a novelty. On 19 November and 28 December 1848 in letters to Sir William Hooker, the director of the Royal Botanic Gardens at Kew, William explained that evergreens should be: 'clipped into various artificial shapes i.e. to be orthodox – therefore any natural forms which are most quaint & formal of course will answer best . . . the more you ring the changes on the spiral – the round or the pyramid the better they should be.'²

A move towards artifice in gardening towards the end of the eighteenth-century, and again with the Jacobean Revival of the mid-nineteenth century, can be partly explained by the abandonment of certain theories about nature. The upper classes became disillusioned with the open spaces advocated by Lancelot Brown, perhaps in part because nature was no longer glorified as being the unmarred work of God. Older schools of thought about the divinity of nature were largely superseded by the latter years of the seventeenth century; for example Thomas Burnet's (c. 1635-1715) metaphysical theories were abandoned. He had postulated that: 'the earth originally was a paradise with a

1 William Nesfield referred to the importance of Kip's folio works in his Plan 1; 'Gd. Plan of Details of *Parterre*, Entrance Court at Wroxton Abbey', Oxfordshire, March 1846 (Nesfield Archives).

2 Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, English Letters.



Comparison between the mazes at Somerleyton Hall, Suffolk and Worden Hall, Lancashire.
The dotted line indicates path to the centre of the maze in each case.

smooth and unobjectionable skin marred by neither Mountains nor oceans',¹ a theory that had been accepted for generations and had been set down in his *Sacred Theory of the Earth* of 1681. A more radical philosophy had emerged by the early eighteenth-century: men were self-determining and shaped their own environments. It was recognised that there was nothing natural about the English landscape, as it had been altered and cultivated by man for generations. By the latter years of the eighteenth century, therefore, the proposition could be developed that if the landscape did not derive from unaided nature, why pretend otherwise?

The gradual re-emergence of the geometrical gardens (which were to be produced by William from the late 1830s) began with the creation of a formal flowerbed at Nuneham Courteney in Oxfordshire. The second Earl of Harcourt commissioned the services of landscape gardener and poet George Mason (1725-1792), who transferred to the garden his interpretation of a scene laid out by Jacques Rousseau's novel of 1761, *La Nouvelle Heloise*, which Paul Sandby Snr painted in 1772.

These early flowerbeds were still, however, informal picturesque creations in keeping with the landscape in which they were placed. They were not situated below the main façade of the house as they would be in the nineteenth century. An exception to the rule, however, occurred at Hartwell in Buckinghamshire, the seat of Sir William Lee and his wife Elizabeth, both enthusiastic gardeners. Mark Laird cites a sketch planting plan in the Bodleian Library, Oxford depicting sixteen

¹ Marjorie Hope Nicolson, *Mountain Gloom and Mountain Glory* (University of Washington Press, 1959), p. 71.

flowerbeds which were circular, elliptical and kidney-shaped and suggests that: ‘The disposition of flowers in 10 of the beds suggests residual elements of the grid of quincunx arrangements that had dominated the plat-bands and straight border since the time of London and Wise – an astonishing degree of continuity.’¹ The gradual awakening of interest in colour and formality, as a relief from Brown’s bland landscapes was reinforced by Uvedale Price and Henry Holland (1745–1806) who declared that old, venerable avenues should be preserved, a notion that grew in popularity. As has been observed, ‘thereafter it became a consistent theme that venerable avenues ought not to be destroyed, even when the writers opposed the planting of new ones’.² The introduction of the terrace as an architectural platform and transitional zone between the house and the park was a crucial element in ensuring that the symmetrical formal garden could be aligned on the most important rooms of the house. As Price explained in 1794:

Nothing, I think, can be more natural, or more pleasing than to discover that intense design has been at work in the immediate environs of a house . . . any sudden transition from the manifest design which must necessarily be found in untamed nature, must always be harsh and unpleasing. Straight terraces, terraced walks, statues, fountains, flights of steps, balustrades, vases, architectural seats, and formal *parterres*, knots and flower beds, are therefore most naturally the more immediate accompaniments of a mansion. They are employed for the purpose of softening off art into nature, and thus removing the harsh effect of sudden transmission, in the same way that an artist softens off hardness of outline in his picture.³

Price bitterly regretted destroying the flower garden on his estate at Foxley in Herefordshire: ‘not from disliking it: on the contrary it was a sacrifice I made against my own sensation to the prevailing opinion I doomed it, and all its embellishments with which I had found such an early connection to sudden and total destruction.’⁴

These opinions developed alongside the growing interest in historical accuracy, which John Claudius Loudon’s *Encyclopaedia of Gardening* helped to promote. Examples of random serpentine flowerbeds featured in Maria Jackson’s *Florist’s Manual* of 1823. By the time George Johnson wrote his *A History of English Gardening* in 1829, the move towards history and artifice in the garden was well under way. Johnson was amongst a number of writers, journalists and gardeners who recommended a certain artificiality in gardens close to the house, in keeping with the architectural structure it was intended to complement. Johnson condemned ‘the more easy mode Brown and his corrupt imitators

1 Mark Laird, *The Flowering of the Landscape Garden: English Pleasure Gardens 1720–1800* (Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press 1990), p. 363.

2 Brent Elliott, *Victorian Gardens* (B.T. Batsford Limited, 1987), p. 57.

3 Uvedale Price, *Essays on the Picturesque*, 1842, p. 162.

4 Charles McIntosh, *The Flower Garden* (S. Orr & Company Limited, 1838), p. 4.

adopted.¹ He wrote that their designs were: ‘so palpable and ignorantly unvarying that it soon roused the satire of better judges.’² Johnson traced the changes in garden style from the Romans through to the time in which he was writing, regarding the close of the eighteenth century as a time of great improvement in gardening. Humphry Repton’s (1752-1818) gardens were becoming increasingly antiquarian in nature, even taking the form of geometric *parterres*, as at Beaudesert in Staffordshire. Here, in 1813, he placed a *parterre* across the façade of the house. At Ashridge in Hertfordshire he emphasised the necessity of returning ‘to those ancient trim Gardens, which formerly enlightened the venerable inhabitants of this curious spot.’³ Repton is credited with laying out flowerbeds in the environs of the house, and there are examples of isolated island beds designed by him in 1808 for the Royal Pavilion, Brighton for the Prince Regent, where he used French-style basketware containing flowers. Mark Laird has remarked on Repton’s use of French motifs such as *parterres*, *treillages* and *corbeilles*. The circular *corbeilles* (flowerpots or large nosebags) demonstrate Repton’s familiarity with the French garden.

Repton’s visual standards and sources differed from William’s, as his formal designs were largely set in a framework of the picturesque garden. Nevertheless, both had a desire to do away with hard lines and open up wide vistas and incorporate well-disposed trees into the landscape. That William was in accord with Repton’s interpretation of what constituted a Picturesque scene is not in doubt, and there is evidence to suggest that Repton’s work was the catalyst that prompted him to install the French *parterre* as the central feature of his designs. He undoubtedly admired Repton above all other landscape gardeners that would have influenced him at the start of his landscape design career. For example, he would have been in agreement with Repton’s ‘Appropriation’ theory, which proposed that an estate should display a united and uninterrupted appearance. Repton had a commonsense attitude regarding the laying out of gardens so that the domestic fronts were in alliance with the House: ‘The intimate connexion between the kitchen garden, for produce, and between the stables and the garden, for its manure, is so obvious that everyone must see the propriety of bringing them as nearly together as possible, consistent with the views from the house.’ This commonsense view also applied to Repton’s opinion that the garden:

Is an artificial object, and has no other pretence to be natural, than what it derives from the growth of the plants which adorn it, their selection, their disposition, their culture, must all be the work of art, and instead of that invisible line, or hidden fence – which separates the mown lawn from the lawn fed by cattle it is more rational to

1 George William Johnson, *A History of English Gardening* (Baldwin & Cradock and Longman & Company, 1829), p. 267.

2 For information regarding Brown’s introduction of colour, floral display and formality in his gardens, see Mark Laird, *The Flowering of the Landscape Garden*, p. 382 and Jane Brown, *The Omnipotent Magician: Lancelot ‘Capability’ Brown 1716-1783* (Chatto & Windus, 2011).

3 Humphry Repton, *Fragments on the theory and Practice of Landscape Gardening* (T. Bensley & Son for J. Taylor, London, 1816).

shew that the two objects are separated, if the fence is not unsightly – otherwise, we must either suppose that cattle are admitted to crop the flowers and shrubs or that flowers and shrubs are absurdly planted in a pasture exposed to cattle, or which is more frequently the case, we must banish flowers entirely from the windows of a house, and suppose it to stand on a naked grass field.¹

Renaissance theories advocating both unity and variety in both the landscape and the garden, which were consistent themes by the time William took up landscape gardening in the late 1830s, were expressed by a number of garden writers. For example in 1839 Charles McIntosh (1794-1864), the head gardener at Claremont in Surrey and later Dalkeith in Edinburgh, wrote *The Flower Garden*, in which he observed: ‘We cannot see why the smaller beauties of the flower garden should not require attention, as well as the larger beauties of the lawn, vista and the approach.’² McIntosh was a practical gardener with a wide experience in the gardening world and he contributed to the gardening magazines of the day, founding the *Cottage Gardener* in 1848, which, in 1861, was to become the *Journal of Horticulture*. He was also a barrister and garden historian and, therefore, was interested in the move towards history and artifice in the garden and the argument that because gardens were made by man they should complement the architecture of the house. McIntosh was influenced by the French philosopher Victor Cousin (1792-1867) and his book *The Philosophy of the Beautiful*, which had been translated by Jesse Cato Daniel in 1848. Cousin wrote on what he considered constituted Beauty, maintaining that: ‘in order that an object may be beautiful it must express an idea, second it must present unity which manifests the idea, third it must be composed of different, and determined parts; in other words, the three conditions of Beauty are, the moral idea, unity and variety.’³ This is a theme that was also taken up by Shirley Hibberd in his publication *Rustic Adornments for Homes of Taste*, which was published in 1856, 1857 and reissued in 1870. Hibberd observed that it was necessary to:

Subordinate every detail to the production of a complete effect. Every contrast should help to conserve and strengthen the harmony of the whole, the details should assist each other in creating a succession of pleasing, cares, anxieties, and occupations, and a varied scene of ever changing delight. It should be borne in mind by every cultivator of taste in gardening, that a garden is an artificial contrivance, it is not a piece scooped out of a wood, but in some sense a continuation of the house. Since it is a creation of art not a patch of wild nature, so it should everywhere show the evidence of artistic taste in every one of its graduations, from the vase on the terrace to the ‘lovers’ walk in the distant shrubbery.⁴

1 John Claudius Loudon, *The Landscape Gardening and the Landscape Architecture of the late Humphry Repton, Esq.* (Cambridge University Press, 2013).

2 Charles McIntosh, *The Flower Garden* (William S. Orr Company Limited, London, 1838).

3 Victor Cousin, *The Philosophy of the Beautiful*, translated with notes and an introduction by Jesse Daniel (William Pickering, 1848), pp. 133-134.

4 Shirley Hibberd, *Rustic Adornments for Homes of Taste* (Groombridge & Sons Limited, 1870).

A number of garden writers attempted to classify the various garden styles, and amongst them was McIntosh. Although his publication *The Flower Garden* was largely devoted to the practical area of gardening, giving advice on, for example, rock work, water basins, seed sowing, the growing of bulbs and the preparation of soil, his interests went much further. He endeavoured to place the various styles into categories: 'Like all the fine arts, gardening has at different periods been practical in particular styles – all, markedly distinguished for their several peculiarities as the Egyptian, Grecian, Roman, and Gothic styles of architecture, or the Italian or Flemish styles of painting and every such style must, more or less, have had its foundation in human nature, having the prevalent acquired taste grafted upon and intermingled with the innate principles of taste.'¹

McIntosh listed what he considered to be the main characteristics in these gardens and categorized them accordingly:

ITALIAN Characterised by one or more terraces, sometimes supported by parapet walls, on the coping of which vases of different forms are occasionally placed, either as ornaments, or for the purpose of containing plants. Where the ground slopes much, and commands a supply of water from above, jets d'eau and fountains are introduced with good effect.

FRENCH The French partially adopt the Italian style close to their chateaux and houses, and, beyond the terraces, lay out *parterres*, sometimes in very complicated figures.

DUTCH The leading character of the Dutch style is rectangular formality, and what may sometimes be termed clumsy artifice, such as yew trees cut out in the form of statues, though they require a label to inform the observer what they mean to represent.

ENGLISH It is generally understood that the style termed English in gardening consists in an artful imitation of nature, and is consequently much dependent on aspect and accessories. In the true English style, accordingly, we have neither the Italian terrace, the French *parterre*, nor the Dutch clipped evergreens.²

There was still uncertainty, however, throughout the 1830s regarding the appropriate style to adopt in the flower garden. For example, in 1834, although the editor of the *Gardener's Magazine* proclaimed that to be a work of art the landscape garden has to be artificial, he apparently was unable to decide on what form this return to artificiality should take, indiscriminately labelling designs 'Classical', 'Gothic', 'Elizabethan', 'Dutch' and 'French'.

By the early 1840s the subtle changes in garden design that had taken place from the Tudor to the Stuart period was better understood. Covered walks, bowling greens, bowers, mazes, mounts, knot gardens containing herbs and native flowers, topiary, small

1 Charles McIntosh, *The Flower Garden* (William S. Orr Company Limited, London, 1838).

2 *Ibid.*, pp. 9–23.

fountains, canals and heraldic decoration on painted wooden poles were attributed to the Tudor period. By contrast, during the reign of James I a distinctly Italianate style prevailed, the house aligned with the garden, and featuring hydraulics, straight approach roads, stone steps, balustrades and long straight avenues.

When William began to develop his formal gardens the foremost garden writer was Loudon, but he was not always in agreement with Loudon's theories. For example, he would not have approved when, in 1832, Loudon promoted what he termed the 'Gardenesque', a term which meant the isolation of trees and flowers as individual specimens. William's opinion was that it was necessary to subordinate detail to the overall effect as a way of achieving variety and harmony. However, in the early years of his landscape design career he was anxious that his clients should appreciate that such an influential writer and publicist approved of his work and he would have appreciated Loudon's interpretation of what constituted a Picturesque landscape which was: 'the imitation of nature in a wild state, such as the painter delights to copy.'¹ When Loudon visited Fortis Green in order to discuss the article he was writing in the *Gardener's Magazine*, William took the opportunity to impress his influential client the Duke of Newcastle, who owned Clumber Park in Nottinghamshire. In a letter to the Duke he wrote: 'At the time I was drawing the plans for Arboretum & French garden, Mr Loudon happened to call – and I showed him the designs which he highly approved of – the latter was especially admired in as much as he begged for a tracing of it for his publication.'²

By the early years of the nineteenth century the tentative return to artifice in the garden, and the rejection of the landscape park associated with Brown, was complete. Brown's destruction of the terraces, steps and statuary associated with the Jacobean period was now considered as something to be regretted, as was his: 'destruction of villages and even towns if they were in line of sight of the landowner's mansion.'³ There was a need for more controlled gardens close to the house. There are isolated instances of *parterres* being introduced in the 1830s, for example at Audley End by instructions of the 3rd Baron Braybrooke. The design is reputed to have been taken from an eighteenth-century pattern book, and included plants such as geraniums, fuchsias, old rose varieties, and eschscholzias, with evergreen trees providing a backdrop around the outer edges. The criticism levelled at this *parterre* design was that 'it ought to have been sunk to have done it justice, and so viewed from a terrace, but in consequence of the low position of the house that idea was no doubt found to be impracticable.'⁴ Later in the century, at Oxburgh Hall in Norfolk, a *parterre-de-broderie* was laid out to the

1 John Claudius Loudon, *Gardener and Villa Companion* (Longman, Orr, Brown, Green and Longmans and A.C. Black, Edinburgh 1838), pp. 164-166.

2 Correspondence between William Nesfield and Henry Pelham, Clinton, 4th Duke of Newcastle, 8 June 1838, MSS Ne C7 302/21, Manuscripts and Special Collections, Nottingham University.

3 David Watkins, *The English Vision – The Picturesque in Architecture, Landscape and Garden Design* (John Murray, 1982), p. 181.

4 *The Garden*, 21 July, 1877, p. 57.

east of the Hall. It was almost identical to one of the designs illustrated in *La Théorie et la Pratique du Jardinages* by Antoine-Joseph Dezallier d'Argenville (1680-1765), which was published in 1709. The design had been used in a garden near Paris, where it was seen in 1845 by a member of the Bedingfeld family, who had owned Oxburgh Hall since the fifteenth century. However, instead of dwarf box hedges surrounding the plant-like shapes that made up the pattern and gravels, cotton lavender (*Santolina chamaecyparissus*), Rue (*Ruta graveolens*) 'Jackman's Blue' with panels of French marigolds (*Tagetes patula* and *Ageratum houstonianum*) were planted. It was not until William became a landscape gardener that the *parterre-de-broderie*, based on the ones at Versailles, was widely re-introduced. Although it was impossible for him to recreate the vast and wide sweeping vistas to be found at Versailles, which had been constructed on a monumental scale that could only have been afforded by someone with the power of an absolute monarch, such as Louis XIV, nevertheless, the principles embodied in the Versailles design were aspired to by William. This brings us to his contribution to the retention of strict formality in the garden, but, before looking in detail at his clients and their estates, the following chapter will consider the origins of the *parterre-de-broderie* which was such a central component within his work, together with the artist designers he chose to emulate.