

The Georgian Landscape

Humphry Repton, the most famous landscape designer of the late Georgian period, was commissioned in 1799 by Earl Cowper to produce designs for the landscape near his new house at Panshanger (demolished 1953). In about 1755 work had begun round Cole Green House (demolished 1801) to the designs of 'Capability' Brown. Brown seems to have concentrated on laying out the landscape on the plateau, but a lodge next to the river was also built in his time (extended during Repton's scheme), as was an ice house to the north .



Repton developed the landscape along the valley and not only did he propose making a landscape along this stretch of the river but forming a string of pearls of landscapes threaded by the river, at Tewin Water, which he did, and also Digswell, where Brown had been before him. In the event he gave his advice informally at Digswell but was not commissioned. At Panshanger he dammed the river to make the Broadwater and planted the slopes on both sides to direct views to and from the house, and along and across the valley. He used the old Cole Green House as an eyecatcher from the new mansion and directed views by carefully placed planting of clumps of trees and positioning of the islands in the Broadwater.

His Red Book for Panshanger has his famous before and after watercolours showing his suggested improvements and includes remarks on the landscape.

The ancient woodlands of Panshanger, including the Panshanger Oak, were augmented with many more trees and the line sculpted to produce the curving 'Line of Beauty' fashionable at the time. He also put forward some proposals for the new house, complete with flower gardens and shrubberies, although the house was not built to his design.

Repton himself was 'struck by the beauty of the two hanging banks forming the unusually broad river valley' which offered great scope for improvement.

That this was achieved was noted by Nikolaus Pevsner in his *Buildings of England (Hertfordshire)* 'The views...are still superb, one of Repton's most perfect schemes'.



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