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**Entangled Landscapes and the ‘dead silence’? Humphry Repton, Jane Austen and the Upchers of Sheringham Park, Norfolk.**

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*Abstract*

*This paper explores two aspects of designed landscapes in the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries that are often neglected – first, the importance derived from intersecting (auto)biographies of designers and patrons, and, secondly, how they relate to global social, economic and political networks. Sheringham Park, Norfolk, reveals the significance of the relationship between the designer, Humphry Repton, the patron and his wife within their respective (auto)biographies. It is positioned alongside Jane Austen’s Mansfield Park (1814), its exact contemporary, to draw out relationships between the principle actors and the wider colonial world. The paper will therefore address questions about the role of designed landscapes in personal and historical narratives, and in particular, their position within the international issue of colonialism.*

This paper explores two related aspects of designed landscapes in the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries that are often neglected – first, how they might derive importance from their place within intersecting (auto)biographies of both designers and patrons at the micro level, and secondly, at the macro level, how they embody contemporary social and political concerns at a national and international level, including crucially, how they engage with global nature of contemporary economic and political networks. By exploring Humphry Repton's commission at Sheringham Park on the coast of north-east Norfolk, this paper will consider the importance of his relationship with its owners, Abbot Upcher and his wife Charlotte, to the design process and how the relationship drew upon shared social and political views which extended across to events on the

continent, and people and place were connected to colonialism and slavery. As such it situates the landscape alongside a contemporary cultural work, Jane Austen's *Mansfield Park* (1814), which deals with many of the same issues of political ethics, estate improvement and colonialism at the turn of the century, and which uses Repton to communicate a particular set of sensibilities towards landscape. The paper will therefore address questions about the role of designed landscapes in political and historical narratives, and in particular, their relevance to understanding the reception or evasion of colonialism in the early-nineteenth century.

Given the amount of material surviving for Repton it is perhaps not surprising that he has already been the subject of a geographical biography (Daniels 1999), and Stephen Daniels has discussed Repton's involvement at Sheringham on a number of occasions (1986, 1993, 1999) within national and continental contexts. Similarly, colonialism and estate improvement has been discussed as a literary theme within *Mansfield Park*, most notably by Edward Said (1994), but there has been little development of the theme within landscape studies. This paper will consider Repton's landscape at Sheringham within the context of colonialism for the first time, and discuss how the relationship between the domestic and the colonial was negotiated through biography within early nineteenth-century cultural landscapes.

### **Sheringham: a biographical landscape**

Repton's professional involvement at Sheringham, on the north-east coast of Norfolk, was entangled with political issues of a local, national and global nature from the outset. Three years after the battle of Trafalgar and Nelson's death in 1805, Repton was tipped off about a government scheme to settle £90,000 on an estate as part of the nation's gift to Nelson's family. Repton's son William, a solicitor in the nearby market town of Aylsham, was acting as steward to Cook Flower who owned the Sheringham estate, and suggested that it might be a suitable candidate as it was situated on the coast not far from Burnham Thorpe where Nelson was born in 1758 (Daniels 1999, 90-91). But Repton's bid was unsuccessful and William sold the land to Abbot Upcher and his wife Charlotte

(Figs. 1 & 2). Upcher was the son of Peter and Elizabeth Upcher, wealthy farmers of Ormesby St Michael, on the eastern edge of the Norfolk Broads, about six miles north-west of Great Yarmouth, where their third son, Abbot was born in 1784 (Yaxley 1986, 1). His young wife was the daughter of the Rev. Henry Wilson of Kirby Cane, to the south-west of Yarmouth, who later inherited the title of Baron Berners (Yaxley 1986, 1). The couple and their new family had suffered a series of setbacks in their search for a suitable home, but Upcher was won over by the 'beautiful and romantic' landscape at Sheringham, despite being 'cruelly disappointed' with the house which he described as 'only a better type of farm house' (NRO UPC 156/1 641 x 8).

Upcher recorded signing the agreement for Sheringham in the early evening of Wednesday July 10th 1811, having dined with William Repton and his father 'the famous planner of grounds &c' in Aylsham (NRO UPC 156/1 641 x 8). This, their first meeting, resulted in Humphry Repton being commissioned to improve the landscape and design a new house fit for the young owners. He produced his Red Book for Sheringham (RBS) exactly a year later (Fig. 3)<sup>1</sup>, which included designs for the new house, drawn up by his eldest son John Adey Repton, who had trained with the Norwich architect William Wilkins and had been an assistant to John Nash in London, before joining forces with his father in 1800 (Carter, Goode and Laurie 1982, 129-130). From the outset, it is clear that Sheringham had deep personal resonances for Repton:

"After having passed nearly half a century in the study of natural scenery and having been professionally consulted in the improvement of many hundred places in different parts of England, I can with truth pronounce that Sherringham [*sic*] possesses more natural beauty and local advantage than any place I have ever seen...this may be considered my most favourite work." (RBS)

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<sup>1</sup>The Red Book for Sheringham is unpaginated as is a facsimile published in 1976. Direct quotes are simply referenced RBS in the text.

Even if one discounts Repton's customary flattery towards his patrons, and the fact that this was a substantial commission during a period when the lack of work had caused him considerable anxiety, there is a real sense that he was celebrating a return to home ground. His mood may have been coloured by the recognition that he was entering the final phase of his career, at the age of fifty-eight, but it undoubtedly reflected his pleasure in returning to Norfolk, which he habitually referred to as 'the Prophet's own country' (Repton 2005, 26; RBS). Sheringham is situated in the region of Norfolk that Repton was most familiar with. In 1778, at the age of twenty-six, and following the death of his parents, he had retired from an unsuccessful stint as a Norwich merchant, and moved to the Old Hall at Sustead, six miles south-east of Sheringham. There he enjoyed the life of a local squire, contributing pieces on the local landscape, agriculture and churches to Armstrong's *History and Antiquities of the County of Norfolk* (1781), and befriending his landlord, William Windham of Felbrigg Hall, a prominent Whig politician, for whom he subsequently worked during the 1780 election (Daniels 1999, 69-73).

Despite lamenting that his skills had been largely ignored by Norfolk landowners over the course of his career, all but seven of Repton's twenty or so commissions in the county cluster closely together in a triangular area stretching from Norwich in the south, to Sheringham thirty miles north on the coast, and east as far as the edge of the Broads at Honing Hall (Repton 2005, 26; Carter Goode & Laurie 1982; Daniels 1999, fig.68). In the Red Book Repton re-immersed himself in the familiar character of this tightly defined region: its undulating topography and the rich agricultural capacity of the loamy vales winding between the protective hills, which accommodated a profitable mixed agricultural regime of arable and pasture. In both scale and character, the landscape was quite unlike that at Holkham, further along the coast to the west, where Repton had worked for Thomas Coke, 1st Earl of Leicester, and where the light sandy soils and sheep-walks had been enclosed into

the vast rectilinear fields commonly associated with enclosure and the drive for improvement in the late-eighteenth century.

Repton set out a scheme for Sheringham that subtly enhanced the work that Cook Flower had begun, avoiding dramatic alterations, but aimed at improving the limited extent of grassland, supplementing the existing planting with new plantations, and, at its core, proposing a modest new house in the Italianate style (Fig.4), situated in the lee of the hill to shelter it from the ocean and the winds from the north (Williamson 1998, 275-77). Key to Repton's sense of success was his burgeoning relationship with the Upchers: rather than being important simply within Repton's professional biography, Sheringham derives its significance from the confluence of Repton's reflective sense of autobiography and the biography of the Upchers - a young couple in the ascendancy. There were a number of parallels between the lifepaths of Repton and Upcher that fostered both their immediate relationship, and a sense of reflection in the older Repton: Upcher's late father was born in Bury St Edmunds, Suffolk, in 1751 and Repton was born in the same town a year later; Upcher's family connections were in Suffolk and Essex, as were Repton's; and Abbot Upcher was twenty-seven when he bought Sheringham, a year older than Repton had been when he moved to Sustead. Co-incidence also followed lifepaths: Upcher had feared for the life of his wife and young son when the carriage he was driving crashed into a deep roadside ditch near Haddiscoe Dam in poor weather - when only a month earlier Repton had sustained a spinal injury when his carriage overturned returning home from a ball with his daughters in January 1811 (NRO UPC 156/1 641 x 8).

Repton's regard for the Upchers was founded on strongly domestic and paternalistic foundations; it was based on the admiration of a young evangelical family on the threshold of their lives together who would provide the moral lead for the local community. Repton uses family relationships as a recurring theme in the Red Book, noting, for example, that

"All planters delight most in woods of their own creating, as parents are most fond of their own progeny"(RBS). Repton often placed the family at the centre of his landscape philosophy, and his designed gardens are represented as for family use and private recreation, with flower gardens and terraces, rather than landscapes of 'learned allusion' such as Stowe, for example, where in the early-eighteenth century visitors were expected to exercise their classical learning and political wit, whilst promenading past lines of allegorical statues (Hunt 1992, 141). In addition to conventional plans, the Red Book for Sheringham includes sections through the proposed house that are populated by the family, servants and gardeners going about their daily routines, emphasising that the house was a busy and permanent home, rather than a political stage for grandees or a seasonal retreat from London. At first floor level, Repton provided direct access from the suite of rooms which formed the nursery out into the 'Children's gardens, Play ground &c' that were terraced into the hillside behind the house (RBS). Repton also emphasised the place of children within the gardens at Endsleigh in Devon, which he worked on at the same time as Sheringham (1809-14), for very different patrons in the shape of the Duke and Duchess of Bedford (Carter, Goode and Laurie 1983, 150). This awareness of family and lifecycle at Sheringham and Endsleigh may have been prompted by Repton's unexpected reliance on his family following the carriage accident six months before Abbot Upcher bought Sheringham. Repton's injuries restricted his ability to travel the country on commissions, and demanded the use of a wheelchair, frustrating his ability to engage with clients on site. He was suddenly forced to rely on his sister and sons, as evident in the fact that his Red Book for Endsleigh, dated 1814, was not produced at Repton's office and home in Hare Street, Essex, but at his sister's house in Aylsham, where he was also working on the improvements at nearby Sheringham.

Repton was particularly sensitive to the role of resident gentry within their locality, and he saw the arrival of the Upchers as fulfilling the need for the landowning elite to provide social, moral and political leadership within local communities. His increasingly conservative or reactionary views

are well documented and he asserted the benefits of a paternalistic estate with a resident gentleman and family in the Red Book (Everett 1994, 181-194; Daniels 1999, 92). Encouraged, no doubt, by the Upchers' established charitable credentials, Repton emphasized the relationship between the happiness of gentry families in houses from whence returned poor 'women and children with cheerful faces, bearing away jugs of milk & broken victuals', compared to those places from which 'lame and blind beggars were driven away' (RBS). Similarly, offering the poor periodic supervised access to the woodland on the estate to collect dead branches was one way to turn them from 'idle thieves or active poachers' into those ready 'to rise at night to serve the Liberal Patron' (RBS).

Repton's concern with the provision for the rural poor and the increasingly punitive institutionalisation of poor relief over more traditional forms of paternalism is evident in the Red Book when he considers the wider local landscape of the village, and suggests that the workhouse should not be an object 'of disgust to the Rich and of terror to the Poor', but could instead be made to look 'less like a Prison' by removing the high wall in order to open up the street 'into a neat village green with its benches and a *May Pole*, that almost forgotten Emblem of rural happiness and festivity' (original emphasis, RBS). His thoughts on the role of the workhouse in mediating relationships between the poor and polite classes, as expressed through its architectural form and landscape setting, is developed further in his recommendations for the new workhouse at Crayford in Kent, where his son Edward was curate, which he completed while still involved at Sheringham in 1816 (Daniels, 1999, 57-8). Repton's plan was for a south facing, cottage-style workhouse on the heath to capture a healthy dry situation, with a view of the country for the inmates, and a location where the polite inhabitants could purchase fruit and flowers grown by the younger inmates. However, the open sunny aspect of the southern front was to be contrasted with the 'darksome Gloom' of the quadrangle to the north side, which was to be 'considered as a sort of punishment for misbehaviour and refractory conduct' (Repton 1816, 228-29). Repton's workhouse was intended to be an animating element within the landscape, which rewarded 'extraordinary industry or good behaviour', and where girls and boys were not to be trained in spinning or other manufacturing trades, but the 'more wholesome' occupation



of market gardening, whilst the boys were drilled by an old soldier 'to become the future defenders of their Country' (Repton 1816, 227-31; Daniels 1999, 57-8).

Repton's views of the poor and how to deal with them during a time of war and possible revolution reflected contemporary social tensions. His concern that landed power and resources should be deployed to ensure a sympathetic and compliant rural working class was based on both a fear of internal, domestic unrest and the intervention of France, either in a direct military invasion, or stirring up civic strife. Repton readily saw the phantom of revolution behind domestic unrest and perceived a specific geography – both human and economic – to it, that mapped the presence of the manufacturing classes, hence his desire to avoid the young poor of Crayford being trained up in skills of the manufacturing trade. Indeed, part of the appeal of Sheringham, which Repton explained to Upcher in the Red Book, was that it lay outside Norfolk's weaving district where that 'different species of animal' (RBS) - the manufacturer with non-conformist attitudes - was ready to stir up discontent and revolution. Repton had encountered the threat of violence and disorder in the industrialising cloth industry at first hand when he worked for Benjamin Gott of Armley, on the outskirts of Leeds in 1810, and two years later the Luddite campaign of machine breaking gathered strength across the manufacturing districts of the country (Daniels 1981). In Repton's model for political stability, the paternalistic estate stood as a bulwark to social discontent and social change, but he was increasingly worried by what he saw as a tendency for landowners to privilege immediate profits over longer term stability. He was particularly concerned by the increasing distance between the population at large and both the traditional aristocracy and the increasingly numerous *nouveau riche*. He was acutely disappointed by his treatment at the hands of supposedly 'noble' patrons such as the Lascelles at Harewood House, Yorkshire in 1802, for example, where his proposals were 'counteracted' and the new triumphal arch, which articulated the important relationship between the house and the village, was built at an 'unmeaning' distance to both (Repton 2005, 87; Finch 2008, 518-20). Elsewhere, Repton's suggestions for Coke at Holkham went largely ignored, and even his relationship with William Windham at Felbrigg ended in disappointment and dispute (Carter, Goode

& Laurie 1982, 24-25). On the other hand, Repton saw great danger in the actions of those who profiteered during the European wars and either refrained from ploughing that money back into the estate infrastructure, or set about reaping short term profit from estates they purchased, rather than investing on long term and labour intensive projects. His discomfort about the rural social relationships was brought together in the section on 'Improvements' in *Fragments on the Theory and Practice of Landscape Gardening* (1816).<sup>2</sup> Revisiting an imagined estate landscape after ten years, Repton describes how the patriarchal landscape with its sunken park pale and stile, revealing broad-leaved hard woods mixed with thorn bushes, all visible from a shaded bench on the edge of the common, had been radically transformed after the estate was bought by a newly enriched owner 'whose habits have been connected with trade' and who erected a high park paling:

"not to confine the deer, but to exclude mankind, and to protect a miserable narrow belt of firs and Lombardy poplars: the bench was gone, the ladder-stile was changed to a caution against man-traps and spring-guns, and a notice that the foot-path was stopped by order of the commissioners." (Repton 1816, 192-93)

Stephen Daniels has noted that for Repton the social changes occasioned by the economic conditions of war during the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries exemplified 'an unravelling of the economic, aesthetic and moral adjustments that constituted prudent estate management' and that Repton tended to conflate his own physical and financial decline in his later career with a 'terminal malaise corrupting the condition of the country as a whole' (Daniels 1986, 148-49), so it is all the more significant that Sheringham gave him such personal satisfaction, and suggests he found, in the Upchers, a very active sense of paternalistic responsibility.

Despite Repton's growing conservatism and concern at the pace and direction of change in the rural landscape, in some quarters he retained the reputation as a radical improver (Everett 1994, 184).

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<sup>2</sup> Hereafter *Fragments*. The image is discussed in Daniels 1988; 1999, 52-4 and Everett 1994, 185.

Repton is famously mentioned during an exchange about estate improvement in Jane Austen's first mature work *Mansfield Park* (1814), one of two novels (along with *Northanger Abbey*) named after a landed estate, and, critically, one that Austen was writing whilst Repton was working at Sheringham. Austen started planning *Mansfield Park* in February 1811, probably completing it in the summer of 1813, and it was published in May 1814 (Sutherland 1996, vii). Austen's novels are located on or around estate landscapes and their houses, and the estate setting of house, grounds and the wider estate landscape are metonyms for a cultural heritage shared by the participants, and the actions of those actors and their response to that inheritance are taken as an indication of their character and social responsibility, or 'sensibility' (Duckworth 1971b, 25-26; Quaintance 1998). In the novel Austen uses Repton to personify the fashion for ill-conceived programmes of improvement that disregard the ecology of traditional landscapes, and were implemented with complete disregard for the historic cultural inheritance of an estate, and thus mirrored the superficial vanity of new owners unconnected to land or communities.

In *Mansfield Park* Mr Rushworth excitedly plans the transformation of the Elizabethan Sotherton Court: 'Repton, or anybody of that sort, would certainly have the avenue at Sotherton down; the avenue that leads from the west front to the top of the hill, you know', causing Austen's heroine, Fanny Price, to declare: 'Cut down an avenue! What a pity! Does it not make you think of Cowper. 'Ye fallen avenues, once more I mourn your fate unmerited' (Austen 1996, 48). Repton was in fact a fan of Cowper's poems, reading them to William Wilberforce as they toured the Harewood landscape together, for example, and by 1811 he was as conservative in his views as Austen, and shared her opinion – expressed through Fanny - that aspects of the estate landscape carried particular symbolism for social relationships, extending beyond woods and trees to the spatial relationship between the house and its attendant church and village, as highlighted in Repton's comments about dispensing charity from the house, and his dismay at Harewood. Given these areas of common concern, Repton is undoubtedly misrepresented in the novel – as he was as Marmaduke Milestone, in Thomas Love Peacock's *Headlong Hall* (1816) - or rather it is clear that Repton's changing views had failed to

impact on his popular reputation, established during the 1790s during the controversies over the Picturesque and his defence of 'Capability' Brown's legacy (Hunt 1992, 139-40; Everett 1994, 184).

Repton and Austen's use of the estate as a fundamental instrument of political and social stability was one explored by conservative political commentators such as Edmund Burke, who used the destabilising effects of excessive or imprudent improvement within estate landscapes as imagery to convey the effects of revolution on the state, drawing in the wider European context to the simmering social tensions at home (Duckworth 1971b, 45-48). However, Burke was careful to differentiate between 'improvement' and 'innovation'. He associated the former - treating the deficient or corrupt parts of an established order with the character of the whole in mind - with the nature of the English revolution; whilst the latter was 'always odious' and characterised the French revolution (cited in Duckworth 1971a, 33). In *Mansfield Park*, Austen uses Repton's fame as a landscape designer to reference the dramatic and insensitive landscape transformation that he and Austen, like Burke, actually believed had a seriously detrimental effect on the body politic, signifying rapid social change and likely to cause the destabilisation of society through abandoning established tropes of landed paternalism.

The greatest fear was that domestic unrest would be ignited by intervention from the continent. The response nationally was an increasing militarisation of the country on an unprecedented scale. Locally, for example, Abbot Upcher's home town of Great Yarmouth was transformed over his lifetime. In 1782 a heavily armed fort was built in Gorleston opposite the entrance to the harbour with further artillery defences added in 1801, whilst in 1806 Southtown Armoury was built to plans by James Wyatt, providing an arsenal to serve the fleet. William Windham, a close friend and correspondent of Burke who served in government as secretary at war, spent the summer of 1803 raising a volunteer force at Felbrigg and trying to improve the county's coastal defences (Ketton-Cremer 1982, 242-52; *ODNB*). Such was the threat of imminent invasion along the coast that the gentry kept their valuables packed and horses harnessed and the farmers of

Northrepps reputedly kept waggons ready to evacuate their families inland should the beacons along the coast be lit to signal the invasion was underway (Gurney n.d., 11). The constant presence of the navy around the Norfolk coast was captured in one of John Sell Cotman's most striking watercolours, 'The Mars riding at anchor off Cromer', which he painted in July 1807, just before the ship's involvement in the bombardment of Copenhagen. The Mars was a 74 gun ship of the line commanded by William Lukin, heir to the Felbrigg estate, after the death of Repton's landlord William Windham, the last of the direct line, in 1810 (Ketton-Cremer 1982, 258-262). Lukin had been looking to retire from the navy and farm in Norfolk for a number of years and had entered into correspondence with Cook Flower about the Sheringham estate and had even signed a contract to buy the land which was cancelled in 1808, opening up Humphry Repton's interest and the Upcher's eventual purchase (NRO WKC 7/91/1-13 404 x 4). In the Red Book that Repton prepared after the immediate threat of invasion had subsided, the ocean is a constant presence, 'a leading feature in the landscape of an island' (RBS) emphasising the nation's separateness; adding an element of the sublime to the beauty of the landscape; and depicted as a busy shipping channel dotted with craft of all sizes, emphasising its role in maintaining England's security, expansion and commerce. The oak trees at Sheringham predictably take on the mantle of national symbolism (see Daniels 1998). Rather than resisting by yielding, as the birch and sycamore did, the oak plantations stand resolute:

"While Oceans breath may blast a single tree,  
 England's combined Oaks resist the Sea  
 Emblem of Strength, increas'd by Unity" (RBS)

### **Colonial Context**

The domestic political situation in the first two decades of the nineteenth century was rooted in the social and economic changes of the industrial revolution, increasing urbanisation, and their effects on rural communities. However, the revolutions in Europe make it impossible to isolate the

situation within the realm of domestic politics, and, as both *Mansfield Park* and Sheringham Park demonstrate, there was also a strong connection with international tensions.

The central theme of *Mansfield Park*, from which it is possible to draw important resonances with Sheringham, is the shadow that colonialism cast over the English landscape. The domestic and social turmoil that unravels when the patriarch Sir Thomas Bertram is called away to settle issues on his Antiguan sugar plantations demonstrates the importance of his personal authority in both landscapes. As Edward Said has argued, the crisis may bring those relationships dramatically to surface, but what is both more significant and deliberately less apparent, is that 'the domestic tranquillity and attractive harmony' of Mansfield Park is assured by 'the productivity and regulated discipline of the other' (Said 1994, 104). Said argues that Austen synchronises domestic and colonial authority and makes it clear that the practice of ownership, with its social responsibilities and position at Mansfield Park, is sustained by the parallel yet absentee ownership and management of a colonial plantation. That plantation, elided in the novel as an 'absent' or dislocated landscape, is sustained by the barbaric social relationships of slavery. The point Austen makes is that whilst law and propriety are built upon the possession and control of land in England, the whole edifice of the estate, house and household at Mansfield Park, though apparently insulated and self-contained, is in fact underpinned and sustained by colonialism and slavery. Rather than validating a vision of England's uncontested imperial prerogative, Fraiman (1995) argues that the tensions and jealousies within *Mansfield Park* demonstrate Austen's intention to highlight the depravity within social and spatial relationships based on slavery, both abroad and at home.

In the novel, when Fanny Price asks Sir Thomas about his involvement with the slave trade over dinner her question is met by 'such a dead silence' that the subject is awkwardly dropped (Austen 1996, 165). Said has argued that the 'dead silence' suggests that the two worlds cannot be explicitly connected within the polite world, as there simply is no common language to unite the two landscapes (1994, 115). The key issue becomes the extent of that 'dead silence' or whether there were references

woven into the everyday which were cues referencing the colonial context, to which we must become more sensitised. The discourse of colonialism and slavery surfaces dramatically in the Sheringham Red Book, for example, when Repton is writing about the relief of the poor:

‘And whether the poor Slave be driven by the Lash of the Whip, or the dread of confinement in a workhouse, he must feel that Men are not all equal altho’ he may be taught to read that they are so’ (RBS)

Repton amended the passage when he reproduced it in *Fragments on the Theory and Practice*, for publication some five years later to read:

‘And whether the poor Slave is urged on by the Lash of the Negro driver, or the dread of confinement in a workhouse...’ (1816, 205)

Here it seems there is not silence but a dynamic and changing vocabulary – stark within the context of rural improvement and poor relief – that possibly reflects changing sensibilities to the issue of slavery, once the effects and weaknesses of the abolition of the slave trade in 1807 had become apparent. In fact, juxtaposing domestic and colonial conditions was a familiar conceit within the wider discourse of rural reform and improvement, from the late eighteenth century. In the *General View of the Agriculture of the West Riding*, which includes the Lascelles' Harewood estate, the famine and misery predicted as a result of retaining unenclosed common fields and commons, is described as a just punishment ‘for our neglect of the domestic cultivation of our own *bread plant*, and a foolish predilection for the culture of the foreign sugar cane’ (Rennie *et al* 1794, 110). The interplay between geographically distinct but economically dependent landscapes in contemporary literature suggests that there were occasions when the two could share a common language even if only for dramatic

effect. The most frequent use was to draw attention to the increasing brutality and oppression meted out to the British labouring poor, as Repton did, or to highlight the preoccupation of reformers on the abolition of slavery in the colonies rather than on domestic inequalities. The deliberate positioning of the two cultural landscapes alongside each other allowed contrasts to be drawn between the social relations within each landscape and to question polite society's right to represent itself as morally enlightened and politically just (Mitchell 1993, 11).

The economic relationship between the English estate landscape and plantations in the Caribbean, in terms of sustaining change and design, has yet to be studied in detail, and they are still routinely considered as distinct spheres. However, as the nineteenth century progressed, colonial possessions were increasingly seen, not as distinct and separate but, as John Stuart Mill argued,

“more properly as outlying agricultural or manufacturing establishments belonging to a larger community... If Manchester, instead of being where it is, were on a rock in the North Sea...it would still be but a town of England, not a country trading with England; it would be merely, as now, a place where England finds it convenient to carry on her cotton manufacture. The West Indies, in like manner, are the place where England finds it convenient to carry on the production of sugar, coffee...The trade with the West Indies...more resemble[s] the traffic between town and country” (Mill 1965, 3:693)

Both novelist and economist demonstrate the significance of the colonial landscape to the metropole, emphasising the importance of the spatial or geographical in the material realisation of social and economic relationships. Whilst archaeologists and historians tend to deal with space and location through the specifics of a site or estate in the Caribbean or in the



UK, there is a tendency to neglect the particular ties of kinship and ownership which linked landscapes directly (Seymour, Daniels and Watkins 1998). Simon Smith (2006) has demonstrated the importance of kin-based networks to 'gentry capitalism' in his study of how the Lascelles family of Harewood House developed their interests through extensive networks that encompassed many aspects of the Atlantic trade, but the extent to which those colonial networks and connections permeated and operated within contemporary English society is more elusive.

The national investment in sustaining the colonial sphere impacted on the personal and family lives of those involved in its increasingly complex workings. Whilst stationed in the Caribbean in the late 1780s, for example, Nelson met and married his wife Frances Nisbet on the island of Nevis where she was born and brought up (Sugden 2004, 306-316). Repton's family life was also touched by Britain's colonial commitments: on the 22nd November 1808, less than a fortnight before he began to conceive Sheringham as a possible memorial for Nelson, his son Edward married Mary Herbert, the daughter of Joseph Herbert, President of the Council of Montserrat in the West Indies (Carter, Goode & Laurie 1982, 28). Five months later Repton was lamenting to his wife that Mary was stealing young Edward from the family and suffering in the unfamiliar English climate:

'She is a poor cold thing – I found her at Norris's with her hands in thick worsted gloves sitting over the fire...[with] a great shawl on...we must bear with our loss of dear Edw[ar]d – for he is lost to us – but there enow of us to be happy...till Mary + our dee find out those they can love better than us' (quoted in Carter, Goode & Laurie 1982, 28)

Repton's expressed his regret at the loss of his son in his comment about trees in the Sheringham Red Book -

"In proportion as the trees become attached to the Soil so we become attached to them, while our children leave their homes, forming new attachments" and "Our trees are children which never disappoint us" (RBS)

Repton's sense of loss was probably informed by his opinion of his new daughter-in-law's family. Joseph Herbert effectively ran Montserrat for thirty years as a senior member of the white plantation-owning elite. But only a year before the Herbert-Repton marriage, in 1807, he was suspended and then acquitted of exporting slaves after the abolition of the slave trade, and by the 1820s he was heavily in debt and petitioning parliament on behalf of the beleaguered slave owners (Berleant-Schiller 1996). Austen had her own close family connections with the colonial economy, with two brothers in the navy and one in the militia. Her brother Frank sailed on two voyages to the West Indies in 1805 and 1806, calling at Antigua where he formed a hostile opinion of way slaves were treated there (Sutherland 1996, xxiii). Her brother Charles married Fanny Palmer in Bermuda in 1807, and the couple visited Jane at Chawton in 1809, less than two years before she started work on *Mansfield Park*.

All three biographies reveal personal family connections to the colonies and a direct familiarity with the economics of enslaved labour, coercion, and diaspora. Just as Sam Smiles (2008) has shown that J.M.W. Turner invested in the Caribbean economy, so Repton and Austen were drawn into it through family marriages. Repton also saw the impact colonial money was having on the English landscape through working for patrons such as the Lascelles who had grown rich exploiting the Atlantic trade, from owning slave ships to collecting customs, before becoming plantation and slave owners (Finch 2008). At Sheringham, however, Repton's young patrons were drawn from a very different political and social circle. As early as 1766 Abbot Upcher's grandfather, the Rev. Abbot Upcher of

Sudbury, Suffolk, had been in correspondence with Benjamin Franklin through a small philanthropic group called 'The Associates of Dr Bray' (which included Samuel Johnson in their number) that supplied religious books to schools and churches in America and England, and for which Franklin had served as chairman. Upcher was considering donating £1,000 to buy land in Philadelphia and build a school for the purpose of 'educating negro children', and it was an important enough donation to merit Franklin's attendance at the Society's meeting to discuss how best to proceed (Quinlain 1949, 39-40). Although the plans were subsequently interrupted by the death of his wife, Upcher eventually donated £500 to the cause.

Repton and the Upchers shared a belief in the role of the estate and the paternalism of the landlord within the political economy of landscape, and in their wider moral horizons. However, Abbot Upcher's early and unexpected death in 1819 brought the landscaping and building at Sheringham to a halt. Bouts of illness had plagued him from 1811 and in October 1812 he was 'seized with a violent nervous fever', which Repton believed was brought on by the collapse in property prices. Repton responded by offering to sell the estate for Upcher and resurrected his scheme with the Nelson Trust in a series of markedly avaricious letters to his son William (Daniels 1999, 98-99). Upcher recovered, refused to sell, and returned to Sheringham where he continued to improve the estate and implemented Repton's suggestions - planting 500 Spruce trees, new game coverts, as well as fruit trees in the land marked out to be 'experimental fields or kitchen gardens' (Yaxley 1986, 4-6). However, after five years of sustained work on the estate which included pulling down the old poor house and renovating the church, with the house itself months from completion, Upcher was taken ill in the spring of 1817. The fever returned in January 1819 and he suffered a stroke and died on the 2nd February.

As a young widow, Charlotte Upcher took on the role of her late husband by managing the estate and making decisions about letting farms. She also remained an active charitable patron within the locality establishing a Female Friendly Society, a village school, and free Sunday School amongst other local amenities (NRO UPC 58 640 x 8; Yaxley 1986, 38). She was supported in her grief by friends and neighbours Thomas Fowell Buxton and his wife Hannah, who leased Cromer Hall from 1821 before settling at nearby Northrepps Hall in 1828. Buxton took over the parliamentary campaign for the abolition of slavery from William Wilberforce in 1825, and was the public face of a group of evangelical social reformers campaigning against the slave trade and colonial reform. Much of the essential research, collating of evidence, report and speech writing was undertaken in Norfolk by the women in the circle - notably Buxton's daughter Priscilla and his cousin Anna Gurney, who lived at Overstrand Cottage on the edge of Buxton's Northrepps estate, eight miles from Sheringham (Gleadle 2009, 226; Midgley 1992).

Just as the women in the Buxton circle challenged the contemporary dichotomy between the feminine domestic/private and the masculine public/political spheres, which even reformers such as Wilberforce had insisted upon, so did Charlotte Upcher (Laidlaw 2004; Midgley 1992). Charlotte continued to make donations to groups such as the 'Ladies Society for Promoting the Early Education and Improvement of the Children of Negroes and of People of Colour in the British West Indies' into the 1840s, and corresponded with Wilberforce (who she met at Cromer when he stayed with the Buxtons in 1822) and other evangelicals and abolitionists including Rev. William Ellis, Rev. Charles Simeon and Zachary Macaulay (NRO UPC 156/1 641 x 8). Despite being a neighbour and close friend of the Buxtons, Charlotte was on the periphery of their national political campaigns, although she did accompany them to the House of Commons for the passing of the Great Reform Act

in 1832, and she was present at a county meeting in Norwich in 1840 at which the middle-class anti-slavery group, led by Buxton and his friend J.J. Gurney clashed with the local Chartists, eager to press home their dissatisfaction with the new Poor Law, exemplifying the continuing contestation of the abolition movement within the context of domestic protest movements (Gleadle 2009, 249-255).

## **Conclusion**

The Upcher family only completed the house and took up residency in 1839 when Abbot and Charlotte's son, Henry Ramey Upcher - who had laid the first stone of the house's foundation in July 1813 aged three - moved in with his new wife. Charlotte, who remained a widow, lived in a farm house on the estate until her death in 1857 (NRO UPC 156/1 641 x 8). Today garden historians acknowledge Sheringham Park as Repton's masterpiece and the National Trust open the grounds to the public, as Repton had perhaps foreseen - suggesting that 'proper persons' might be admitted at a discrete distance to humanise and animate the scenery (Carter, Goode and Laurie 1982, 129; RBS). Repton's belief that a landscape should facilitate social discourse reflected the growing significance of bourgeois values in the early-nineteenth century, and his patrons, the Upchers, involved themselves in the improvement of the landscape through their own paternalistic principles. So on one level the significance of the landscape at Sheringham Park is recognised in its association with Repton and the Upchers, and it garners new significance from the confluence of their biographies and the wider political tensions and cultural values of those involved in its creation and use, themes which are now recognised in an exhibition and guidebook (Daniels & Veale 2012).

The interrogation of the biographies and social networks reveals a rich personal and political milieu for all those involved with the cultural values expressed, and importantly, practiced through the landscape. Importantly, those themes are directly connected to international issues of slavery and colonialism, about which the previous scholarship on the landscape has been silent. Repton's admiration of Wilberforce, with whom he read Cowper, an abolitionist poet, whilst staying at Harewood House, the material legacy of a fortune made from slavery, should not be dismissed. The chapter 'Concerning Colours' in *Fragments* (1816) is addressed to Wilberforce who introduced him to Dr Milner's theories on light and colour, whilst Repton's publisher, Thomas Bensley, also published a collection of poems in 1809 to celebrate the abolition of the slave trade (Montgomery *et al* 1809).

Repton shatters Said's 'dead silence' about the relationship between landscapes of the metropole and the colonies in the Red Book for Sheringham (1812) when he refers to the 'Lash of the Whip', a statement amplified in *Fragments* (1816) as the 'Lash of the Negro Driver'. Significantly, Repton also changed his comment about manufacturers being a 'different species of animal' (RBS): in *Fragments* they become a 'different class of mankind' (1816, 207) suggesting a shift in perception of the British working classes after the European wars, in response to both the changing domestic tensions, and the dynamic relationship between reform in the metropole and in the colonies.<sup>3</sup> Sheringham Park as a political space, connected biographically and spatially to a wide network of colonial reform that stretched back to the involvement of Abbot Upcher's grandfather with evangelical groups in the Americas during the 1760s, and connected it to the centres of political activity at neighbouring Northrepps Hall and Overstrand Cottage, from where Parliamentary campaigning was orchestrated by women in the Buxton family. The connections link

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<sup>3</sup> I am grateful to Steve Daniels for drawing my attention to these changes, and Bensley's output.

Repton's landscape to the Caribbean and the Americas, and to Africa against the tide of diaspora.

It is by pursuing the relationship between social networks and landscape change that the narrative engages with important global issues that have hitherto been omitted, demonstrating a need to reconsider the role and presence of the colonial within apparently abstracted landscapes of the eighteenth century. Repton's role at both Harewood and Sheringham suggests that there is not a distinction to be made in terms of design between the landscapes of the slavers and the abolitionists. For the Lascelles at Harewood, Brown's park, improved by Repton, was a statement of legitimacy, proof that the family had negotiated the path from colonial merchants to established landed elite; at Sheringham, Repton's designs realised the Upcher's belief in a paternalistic, moral landscape, loaded with the symbolism understood by Jane Austen, that connected a stable community, and acted as a bulwark against the military and ideological threats from abroad. Both landscapes were, however, connected directly to the colonial environment. Harewood, like Mansfield Park, built on the profits of slavery; Sheringham linked to the social networks co-ordinating the growing momentum for abolition. If the importance of people and landscape in the eighteenth and nineteenth century is to be fully understood, there is a need to address the 'dead silence' commonly encountered amongst scholars with regard to colonialism and its role, not just in the obvious urban and institutional centres through which colonial governance and finance was orchestrated, but in the apparently insulated estate landscapes that formed such a fundamental part of the British countryside.

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**Figures**

Fig.1: Abbot Upcher of Sheringham (1784-1819) by George Henry Harlow. Oil on canvas, 73.5 x 61 cm (Copyright National Trust Images).



Fig.2: The Honourable Mrs Abbot Upcher, née Charlotte Wilson (1790-1857), by Richard Westall, 1814. Oil on canvas, 61 x 51.5 cm (Copyright National Trust Images).





Fig. 3: The view of Approach from The Red Book for Sheringham (without overlay) showing sea busy with shipping, and probably the three protagonists, Repton sketching on the right, and the Upchers having alighted from their carriage in the centre (Copyright National Trust Images).



Fig.4: Sheringham Park. The house looking north-east (Copyright: the Author)

