



THE
GEORGIAN
GROUP

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THE ARTINATURAL STYLE

John Harris

This is a paper about wiggles, or serpentines, or meanders and it is all a long time before Hogarth's advocacy of the serpentine line in his *Analysis of Beauty*, 1753. Forty years ago in a seminal article¹ Nikolaus Pevsner proposed that the 'wiggly, puny and playful' infant landscape garden up to about 1730 was rococo. He saw Stephen Switzer's 'promiscuous' serpentine gardens of the period as visually similar and exactly contemporary with French rococo decoration. Oddly, he did not enquire as to whether similar serpentines existed in French gardens. Pevsner's observations were something that Christopher Hussey could not advance to when he unsuccessfully tried² to write about the rococo garden. Hussey's garden of 'ordered geometry' was baroque, and his 'extrovert landscape of near abstract form' was neo-classical³. Try as he may, he could not bring himself to classify the intervening style of gardening aptly called by Batty Langley in his *New Principles of Gardening*, 1728, 'regular irregularity', as rococo, and this may well be due to the fact that Hussey was brought up on that dangerous book⁴ by Fiske Kimball where rococo is applied solely to French decorative arts. I am sure that had Hussey lived longer he would have changed his views, for since his death the term rococo has been extended to so many non-decorative aspects of architecture, painting and sculpture. Happily, I am going to avoid the pitfalls of semantics! I will leave it to those who forget a spade is a spade. This style of gardening was called by Switzer 'Rural and Extensive', and by Langley the 'artificial style' whereas modern semanticists have endowed it with no less than thirteen titles: Elysiums, natural, irregular, informal, early land-

1. 'The Genius of the Picturesque', *Arch. Rev.*, Nov., 1944, pp. 139-45.

2. Unpublished typescript, kindly given to Eileen Harris by John Cornforth.

3. Cf. Christopher Hussey, *English Gardens and Landscapes 1700-1750*, London 1967.

4. Fiske Kimball, *The Creation of the Rococo*, Philadelphia, 1943, reprinted 1964. One might tentatively suggest that there was cause and effect between Pevsner's article and Kimball's book. Pevsner certainly reviewed the book.

scape, formal landscape, transitional, poetic, proto-romantic, proto-picturesque, emblematic, Addisonian and Popeian, and lastly enlightenment!

The fact that these gardens were 'twisted and twisted', as Pope said, in tune to the 'genius of the place' distinguished them from the preceding formal gardens in the French and Italian style with their regimented geometric patterns. That they were also again in Pope's words 'rhymed and harmonious', set them apart from the later Kentian and Brownian landscape gardens. Thus it was perhaps not surprising that Pevsner saw a similarity between the twistings and twirlings, the smallness, variety and informality, the intricacies, of early 18th century garden design and the light-hearted, linear rococo style of decoration that appeared in France at exactly the same time. Pevsner's article was remarkable for 1944, four years before Clarke's *English Landscape Garden* and long before garden history had become a science.

Among some of Pevsner's illustrations was the Thomas Badeslade engraving of Hamels in Hertfordshire, dated 1722 (Fig. 1). Out of a strictly geometric formal garden a wiggly wilderness breaks away across a hill, and in the wilderness can be discovered attractive informal episodes that in modern garden terminology might be described as gardenesque. Then Pevsner illustrated the 'Rural and Extensive garden' (Fig. 2) from Switzer's *Ichnographica Rustica* of 1718, really a wiggling-up of a plan of Versailles, and from the same seminal work came a fortified garden (Fig. 3) that had been based upon a plan (without wiggles) made by Switzer for Grimsthorpe Castle in 1711. Pevsner recognized these as the earliest published wiggles. In addition he showed examples (Fig. 4) from Langley's *New Principles of Gardening*, what were there called 'regular irregularities', geometric outlines filled in with serpentines and twists.

Now it is the task of this paper to take advantage of knowledge gained over the past 40 years. In examining the origins of the forest garden, Cassiobury in Hertfordshire⁵ was one of the first. It was laid out in 1668 for the Earl of Essex, a great gardener in

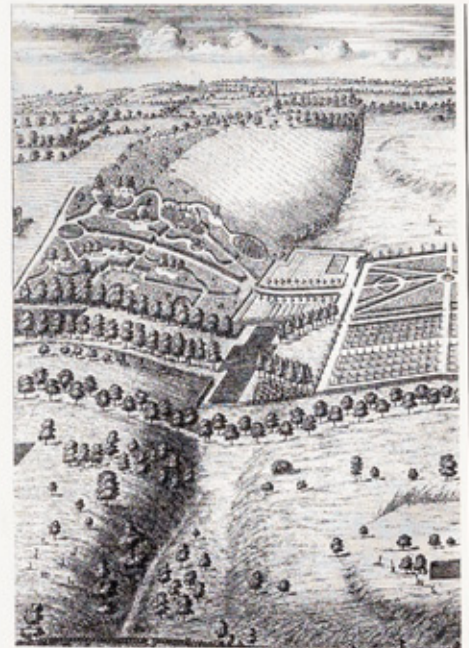


FIG. 1 Hamels, Hertfordshire, from an engraving by Thomas Badeslade.

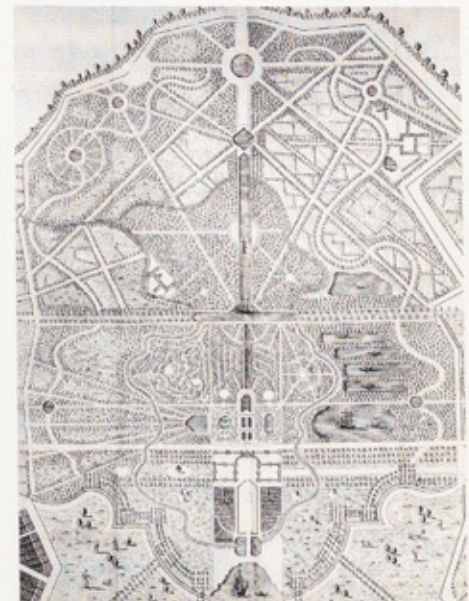


FIG. 2 Stephen Switzer, a 'Rural and Extensive Garden' from *Ichnographica Rustica*, 1718.

5. Knyff and Kip, *Britannia Illustrata*, 1707. The avenues of black firs etc. formed a lozenge, with circles centred by fountains at the breaks of axes.

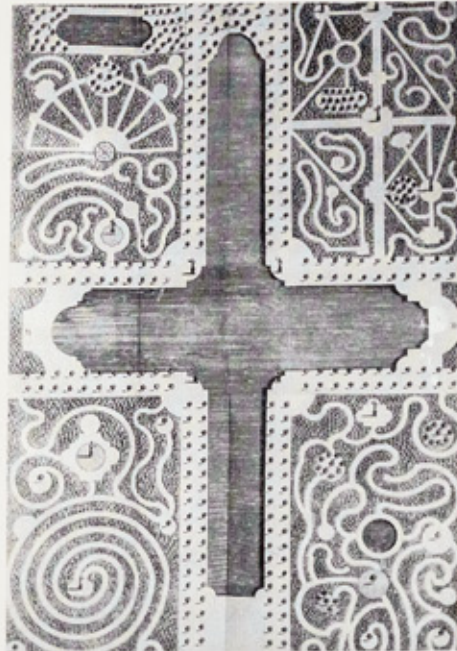


FIG. 4 Batty Langley, a regular irregularity type of garden from *New Principles of Gardening*, 1728.

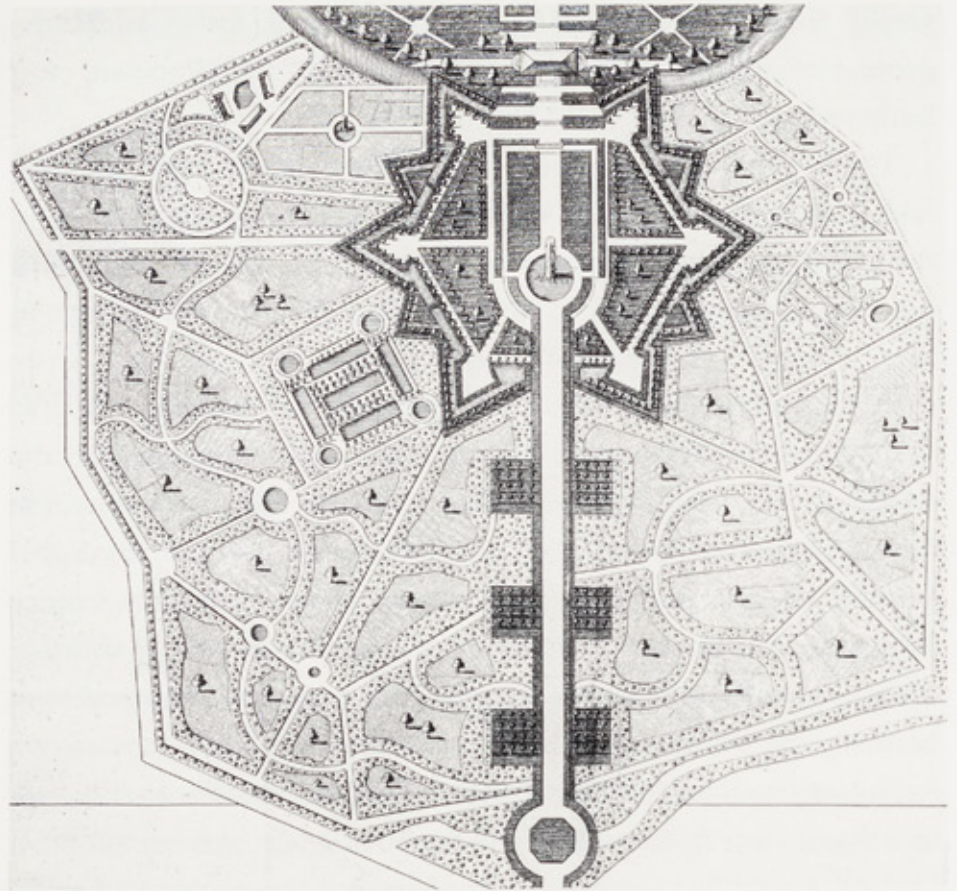


FIG. 3 Stephen Switzer, a fortified garden from *Ichnographica Rustica*, 1718.

6. Knyff and Kip, *op. cit.*

7. For Wray Wood, cf. Peter Willis, *Charles Bridgeman and the English Landscape Garden*, London, 1977.

his own right, by Moses Cooke. The inspiring genius was probably John Evelyn, and significantly this was a garden known to, and closely studied by, George London after the 1670s. Cassio, as it was known, was the inspiration for the Earl of Rochester's New Park,⁶ Surrey, a new house built from 1692, whose garden was almost certainly by George London. It was a forest-garden laid out on the side of the hill beyond which lay Richmond Park, and like Cassio it was an example of formal geometry, but the lines and compartments were more informally cut through the woods. New Park must surely be the fount for the celebrated Wray Wood laid out by Switzer at Castle Howard,⁷ Yorkshire, sometime after 1700. London had also been involved at this Yorkshire seat, and significantly Switzer had been London's 'man'. There is no evidence that Wray Wood had wiggles or meanders. If Switzer

described it as a 'Labyrinth of Nature', he was probably describing a wilderness of the formal sort, struck through with rides and cabinets and enlivened by rills of water. Not surprisingly we find London, designer of the garden at Dyrham in Gloucestershire,⁸ highly praised by Switzer, for there after about 1699 a geometric wilderness was laid out on the hillside just as at Hamels. At New Park, Castle Howard and Dyrham, it is possible to sense the beginning of a dissolution of geometry and to discover intimations of new freedoms.

What may well be the first document illustrating this break-out from the formal enclosure can be seen in the view⁹ (Fig. 5) of Sir William Temple's garden at Moor Park, Surrey, drawn before 1698. A meandering wilderness breaks away from one side of a strictly formal garden.¹⁰ It is tempting to associate this asymmetry with Temple's invention of the word *Sharawadgi* to describe his idea of Chinese gardens, that possessed a beauty 'without any Order or Disposition of the Parts'.¹¹

What Pevsner never realised was just how uniquely prolific meanders were in England between about 1715 and 1735. Indeed

8. For Dyrham, cf. *Dyrham Park Gloucestershire*, National Trust, 1981.

9. Drawing in collection of Surrey County Council, County Library, Kingston upon Thames, often published without any commentary.

10. The French formal garden was, in fact, the style most admired by Temple.

11. Quoted, for example, in *The Genius of the Place: the English landscape garden*, ed. John Dixon Hunt and Peter Willis, London 1975, pp. 96ff.

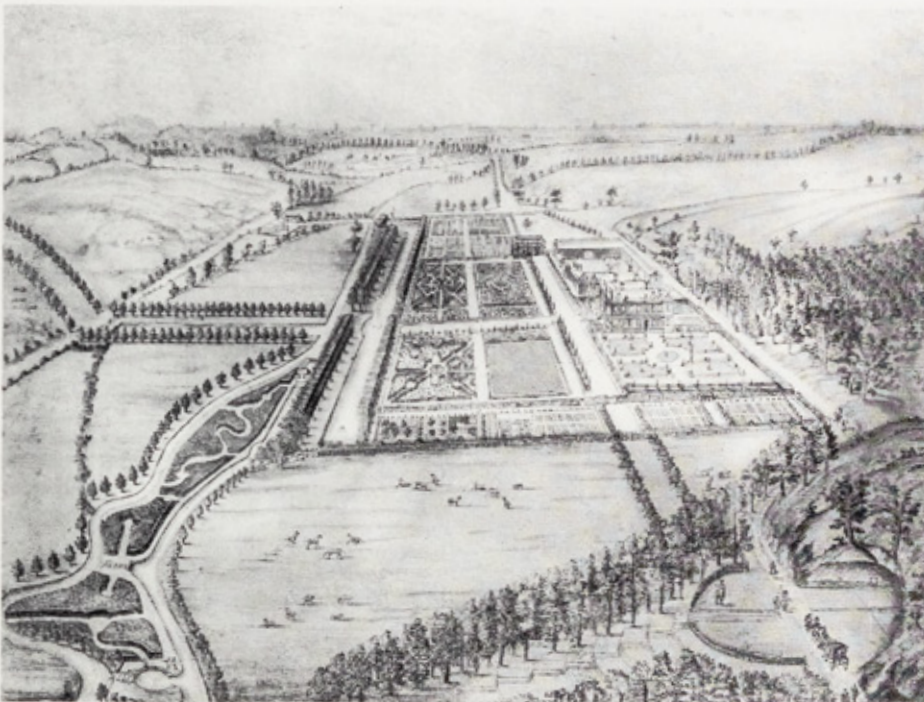


FIG. 5 Jan Kip (attributed to), Sir William Temple's garden at Moor Park, Surrey.

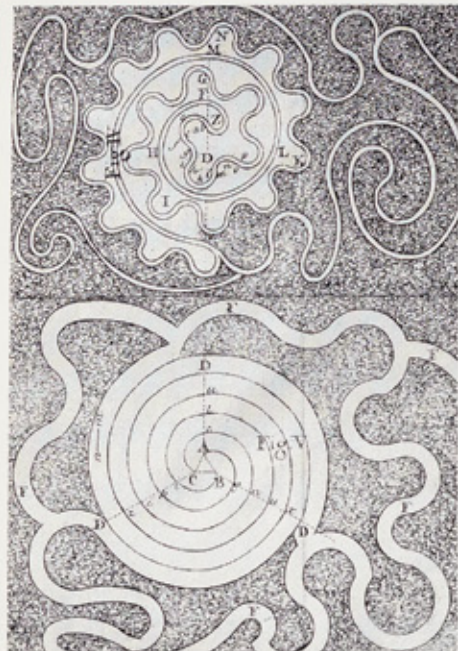


FIG. 6 Batty Langley, 'artificial lines' from *Practical Geometry*, 1726.

12. Langley, *Practical Geometry*, 1726, pp. 101-2.

they are so prolific as to constitute a style of gardening that is peculiarly English, and one that does not occur in any other country at this time. Pevsner also never had access to Langley's *Practical Geometry* of 1726, for there in a section on garden design Langley describes his 'artificial lines' (Fig. 6) as 'not a small help to invention in designing gardening after that rural manner, which are not entirely new, but far preferable to the most regular set form hitherto practised'. The 'artificial walk', he continues, 'demonstrates that the most beautiful gardens are to be made in the most irregular forms or boundaries'.¹² Thus Langley in 1726, elaborated in *Principles of Gardening* in 1728. It surely cannot be a coincidence that also in 1728 appeared confirmation based upon Classical literature for the juxtaposition of irregular and regular gardens, when Robert Castell published his *Villas of the Ancients*, a translation from Pliny's description of his villas at Tusculum and Laurentium. We shall see that this association with the Classical world is relevant in the matter of origins.

A summary round-up of the artificial walk must obviously entirely depend upon the availability of plans of gardens. In that great compendium of gardens published in 1707 as *Britannia Illustrata*, bringing together the views of gardens made by Leonard Knyff and engraved by John Kip, and datable by archival evidence to the period between 1698 and 1706, there is not a single meander.

Meanders can, however, be found in four other accumulations of garden plans or surveys. Firstly there are the surveys to be found in the third volume of Colen Campbell's *Vitruvius Britannicus*, 1725, a source little used by garden historians. The great walled garden behind the house at Castle Howard has some worm-like meanders cut in the box-work, but the date is imprecisely known. Also by Sir John Vanbrugh, and assisted by Henry Wise, is the fortified garden at Blenheim Palace, Oxfordshire (Fig. 7), designed in 1709. The meanders within the fortified perimeter are, however, symmetrically laid-out. The most interesting precursor of Langley's artificial lines can be found on the survey (Fig. 8) of Cholmondeley Hall, Cheshire, where the two wildernesses can

be dated before 1704 when their fountains were installed. Cholmondeley was one of London's major gardens, and it may be relevant that the wildernesses were probably designed after he returned from his visit to French gardens in 1699. Parts of Houghton, Norfolk, are artinatural and can be dated between 1722 and 1724. Goodwood in Sussex, may have a Colen Campbell garden of about the same date, and likewise Thoresby in Nottinghamshire.

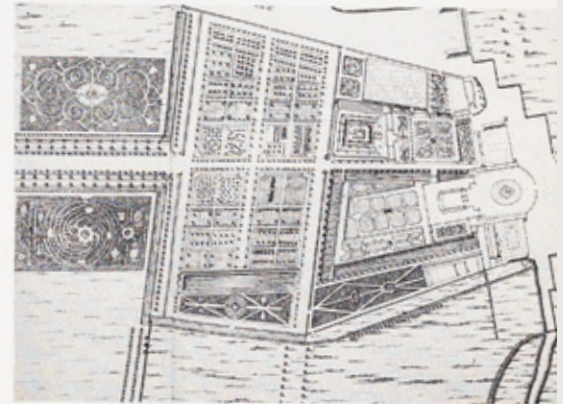
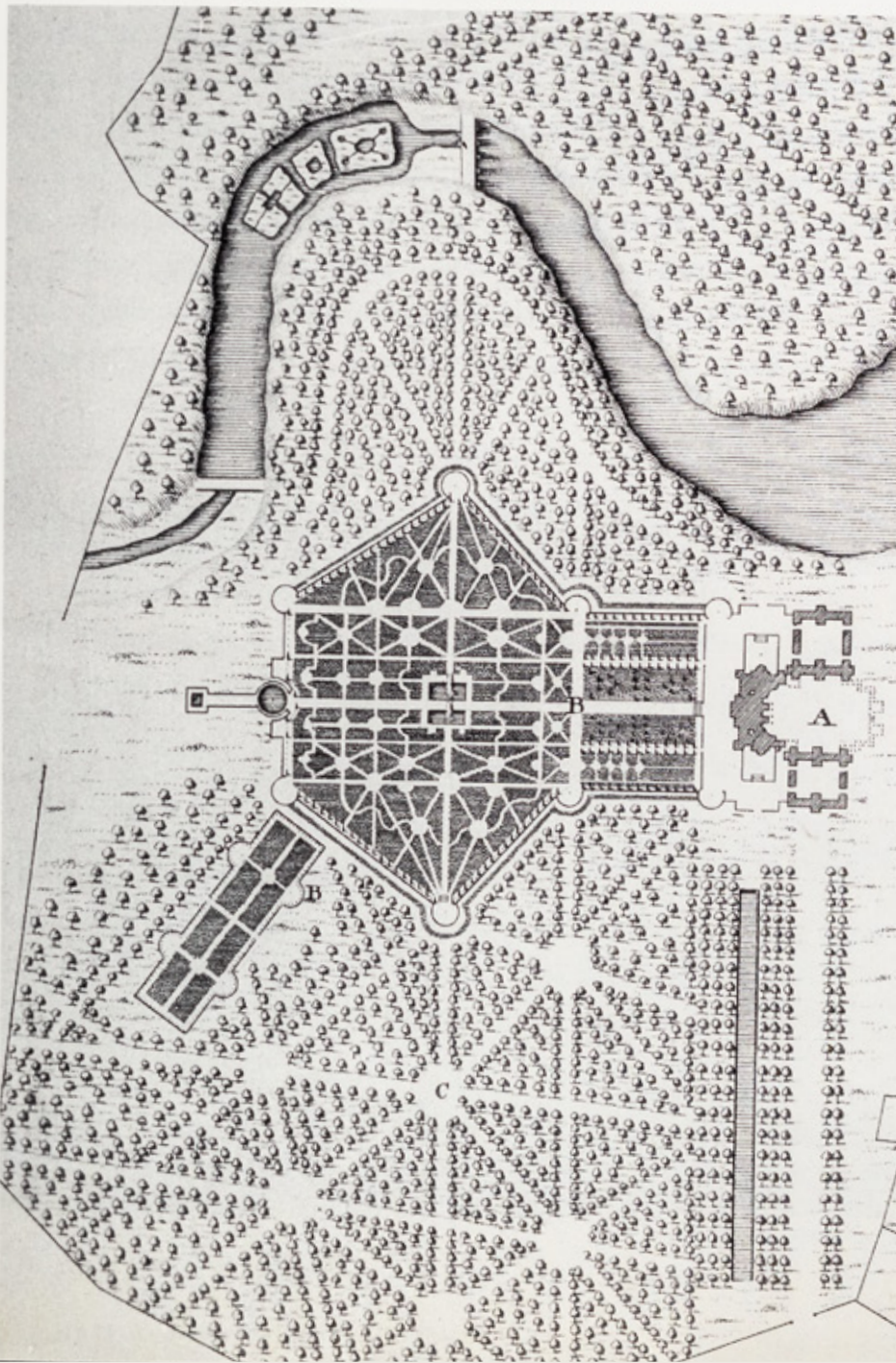


FIG. 8 Cholmondeley Hall, Cheshire, from *Vitruvius Britannicus III*, 1725.

FIG. 7 Blenheim Palace, Oxfordshire, from *Vitruvius Britannicus III*, 1725.

Finally, Narford in Norfolk has a thin compartment in its garden with a single meander, belonging to garden works initiated in 1718.

13. Volume at Elton Hall, Hunts. It has not been observed that this survey is the earliest evidence we have for George London's garden works at Richmond, proving, in fact, that work hitherto attributed to Bridgeman, may well have been by London.

Secondly there is the compendium of engraved surveys by J. Badeslade and J. Rocque, issued in 1739 with a title page carrying the name *Vitruvius Britannicus Volume the Fourth*. Most of the engravings had been published earlier. Richmond Gardens, Surrey, is dated 1736 but with meanders made before 1726 when Sir Edward Lovett Pearce included a survey of the gardens in his designs¹³ for a new palace for George II. Wrest Park, Bedfordshire, was fully meandering by 1736, similarly the Duke of Marlborough's at Windsor Castle by 1738, a garden that might well have been laid out between 1700 and 1710. There is the Earl of Portland's garden (Fig. 9) at Bulstrode in Buckinghamshire, an engraving neither by Badeslade nor Rocque, that may show the layout after 1700. Once again, the designer is likely to have been

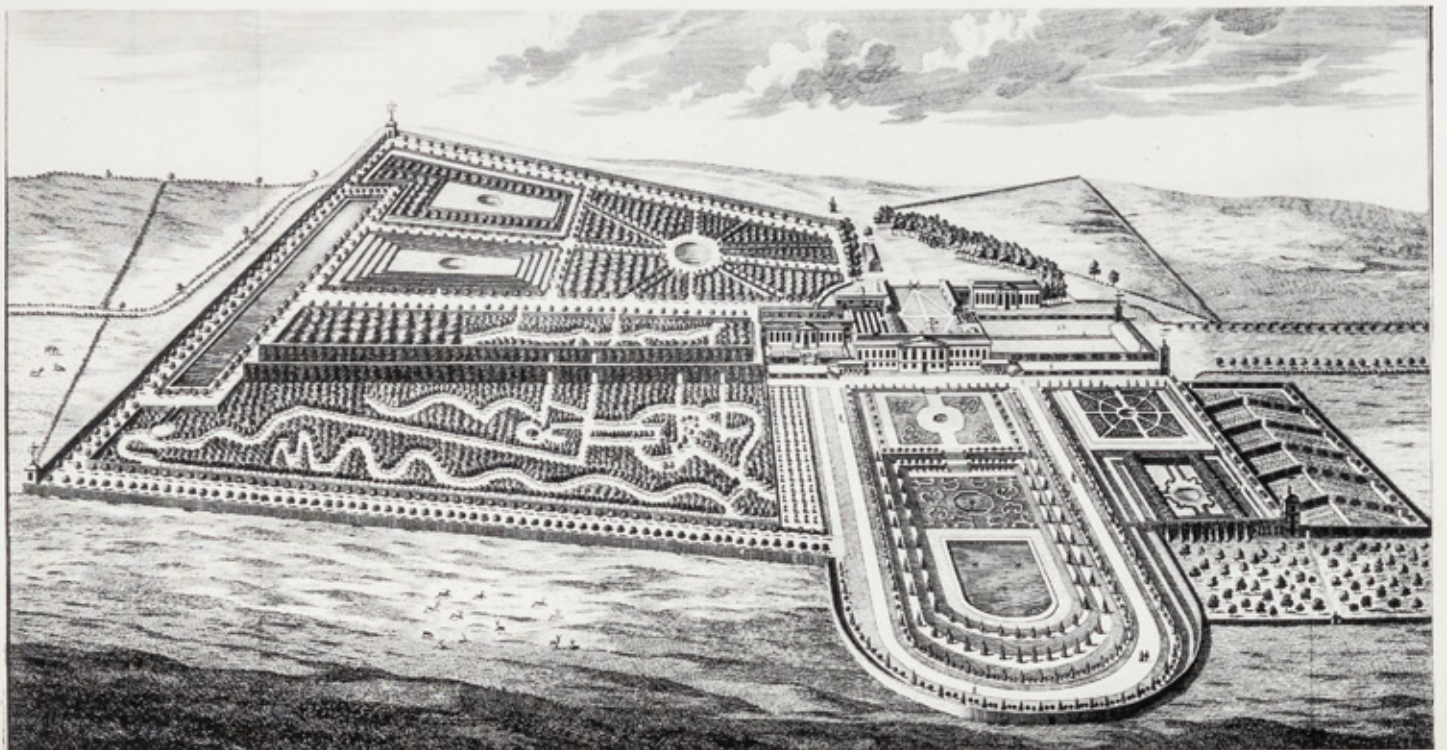


FIG. 9 Bulstrode Park, Buckinghamshire, view published before 1736.

London, Deputy Comptroller of the Royal Gardens under the Comptroller who was Portland, but significantly Portland may also have sought advice from Claude Desgots, whom he had imported direct from the French royal gardens.

Belvoir Castle, Rutland, has a large wilderness engraved in 1731 that may record work done in the 1720s, a decade when the Earl of Lincoln's garden at Oatlands, Surrey, was begun, although some of its many meanders may belong to the few years before 1737 when the engraving was made. Marston in Somerset is a documented garden by Switzer. Its walled fruit garden has asymmetrically wavy walks, possibly made before 1725. The meanders at Chiswick House, Middlesex, are shown on the engraving of 1736 (Fig. 10), but if those between the three avenues were concurrent with the planting of the avenues, then here are early meanders of 1715. Belton in Lincolnshire, has formal meanders in its wildernesses in the style of London and Wise. Those in Sir Charles Hotham's garden in Yorkshire, engraved in 1737, may belong to the late 1720s. Mount Edgcumbe in Devon has an artinatural wilderness of indeterminate date, and likewise Copped Hall in Hertfordshire. The meanders in the Wilderness at Esher Place, Surrey were laid out by William Kent between 1731 and 1737.

The third compendium is Badeslade's views engraved for Dr. John Harris's *History of Kent*, 1719, a work that must have been in preparation from at least 1715. The three gardens with meanders were all laid out for owners with close metropolitan connections: Waldershare Park is likely to date from before 1710 and was a high quality garden in the style of London; Knole Park has a wilderness with geometric and curved paths rather than meanders, and its date may be about 1710, the designer Thomas Acres or Akers; and thirdly there is Chevening House¹⁴ with artinatural shapes cut out of its two wilderness parterres (Fig. 11).

The fourth compendium of views is those by Jan Kip for Sir Robert Atkyns's *Gloucestershire*, published in 1712, and so anything in this county history would be uncommonly early. Thus is



FIG. 10 J. Rocque, engraved plan of Chiswick, Middlesex, 1736.

14. Cf. Elizabeth Banks, 'Restoring an Aged Landscape', *Country Life*, 20 September 1979, pp. 850-52, dating the garden to c. 1718.

Sir John Guise's Rendcombe, a sophisticated formal garden of London and Wise style with a wood on the adjacent hillside struck through with curvaceous rides that appear to have been purposely

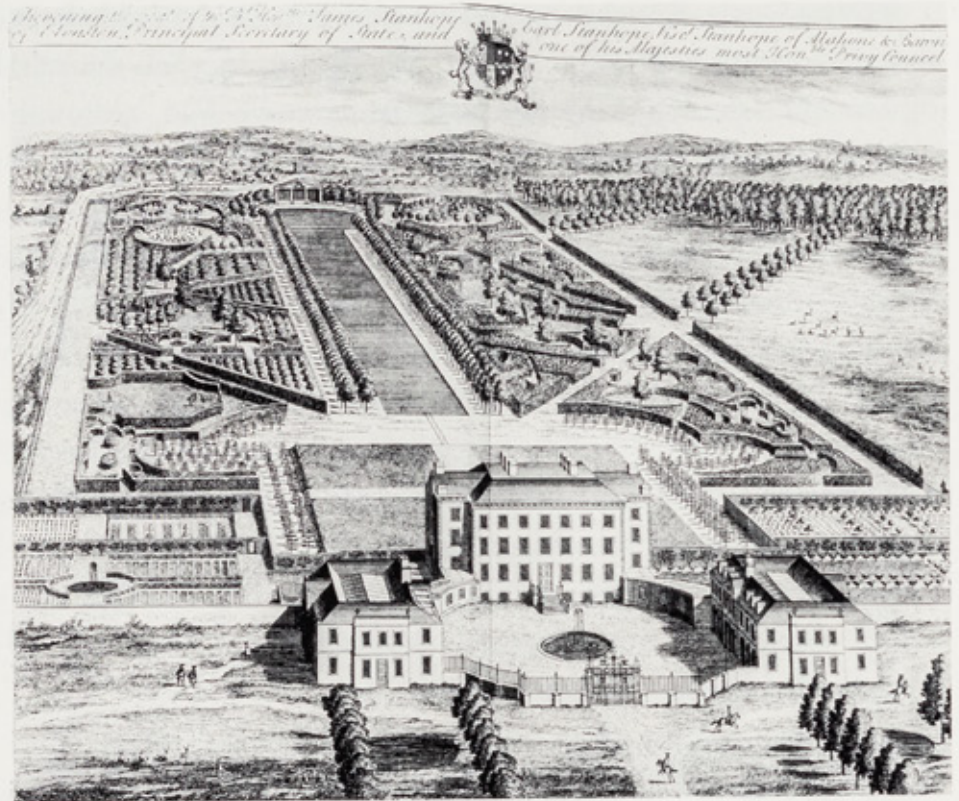
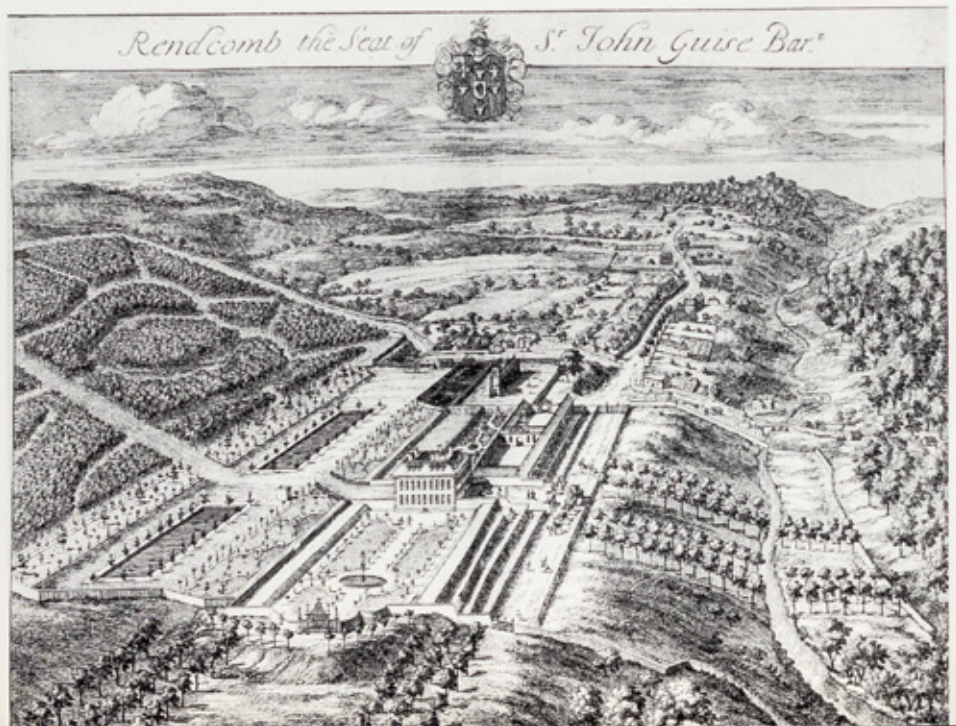


FIG. 11 Thomas Badeslade, Chevening House, Kent, engraved by 1719.

FIG. 12 Jan Kip, Rendcombe, Glos, engraved by 1712.



asymmetrical (Fig. 12).

Finally there are those single engraved surveys or designs and original drawings. The wilderness at Kensington Palace was formed after 1726, a date that can be given to Lord Ilay's nursery garden (Fig. 13) at Whitton Park, Middlesex. The design for Stamp Brooksbank's garden at Hackney may reasonably be dated to about 1727 when Colen Campbell was building the house¹⁵, and this is also the period of Lord Egmont's garden at Turnham Green, Middlesex.¹⁶ Finally there is the extraordinary design for Boringdon in Devon (Fig. 14)¹⁷.

15. For Stamp Brooksbank cf. Bodleian Library, Gough Maps, 17, f. 21b.

16. For Egmont's views, cf. British Library, Kings Maps XXX, 18a.

17. National Trust, Saltram archives.

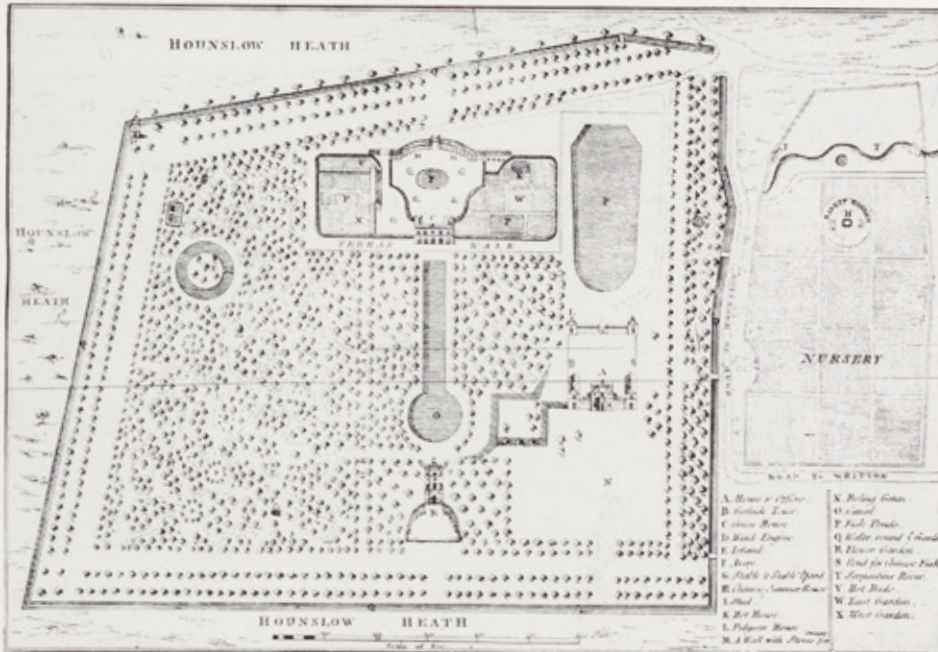


FIG. 13 Engraved survey of Whitton Place, Middlesex.

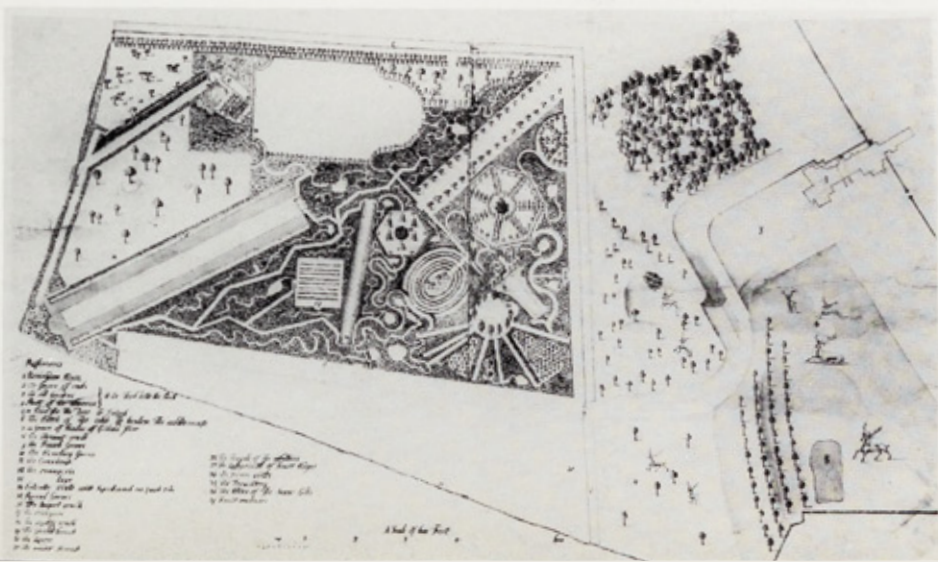


FIG. 14 Boringdon House, Devon, plan for new garden.

It is as if several parts of Castell's *Villas of the Ancients* had been amalgamated into one compressed plan. There are direct references to Stowe's Temple of the Worthies (c.1733) and much else that is not a little odd. Although the author of this design is unknown, it is significant that William Kent, the designer of the Elysian Fields at Stowe, made designs for rebuilding Boringdon in the thirties.

To conclude this round-up of the English love for the meander and the artinatural, the best example is the most unexpected: that great formal garden at Wanstead in Essex laid out for Sir Richard



FIG. 17 J. Rocque, detail of grotto from 1736 survey of Wanstead House, Essex.



FIG. 15 J. Rocque, detail from 1736 survey of Wanstead House, Essex.

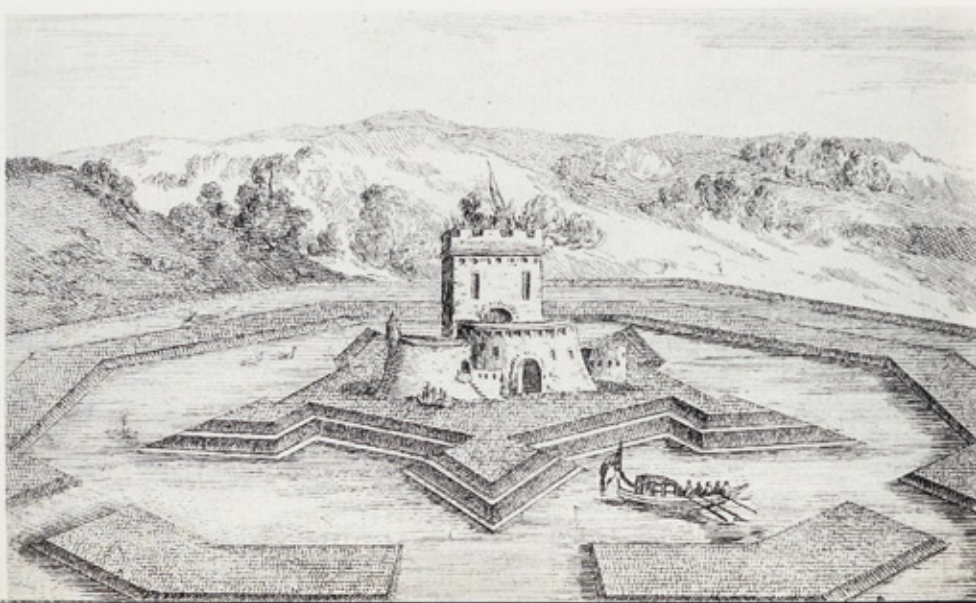


FIG. 16 J. Rocque, detail of mock castle from 1736 survey of Wanstead House, Essex.

Child from 1711, described by Switzer as George London's 'last undertaking'. It was Le-Nôtre inspired and its strictly formal geometry appears on Knyff's engraving specially made in 1715. Twenty years later it had been surveyed by John Rocque, who discloses some astonishing changes. Extensions outwards from the main axis had converted these parts of the garden into the best example of the artinatural. Not only were there plantations of twists and wiggles (Fig. 15), some as concentrated as those for Boringdon, but upon a fortification island stood a mock castle (Fig. 16), nearby was a huge grotto (Fig. 17) unsung in grotto literature, and the wondrous rococo conceit of an island cut into the shape of the British Isles (Fig. 18). Unfortunately the story of Wanstead in the twenties and thirties has never been told due to the loss of family papers, but it may be possible that all this rococo and artinatural work coincided with Kent's alterations to the interior of the house in the late twenties.

So far, this paper has not dealt with origins. Casual remarks have often been made that these wiggles come from Versailles, and are to be found there. This is not true, although there is that working-up of the Versailles plan by Switzer published in 1718. However, a source could have been found nearer at hand at Marly, and what is quite fascinating is that Betsy Rosasco has recently demonstrated that the garden in question was consciously modelled upon the idea of one in an ancient Roman villa.¹⁸

In 1699 when George London visited French gardens he would have examined Marly with care, and he would have observed the two major developments that had occurred since the chateau was begun in 1679. North of the chateau, woodlands and plantations were being threaded with rides, mostly of the geometric sort, but with some meanders. These woods were known as the *Bois de la Princess* and the *Jardin Haut*, and there are certainly some fascinating analogies with London's New Park. Of far more interest was the new *Bosquet de Louveciennes* (Fig. 19), to one side and eastwards of the main axis and behind one range of the pavilions. It is precisely here that occurs a combination of geometric frame-

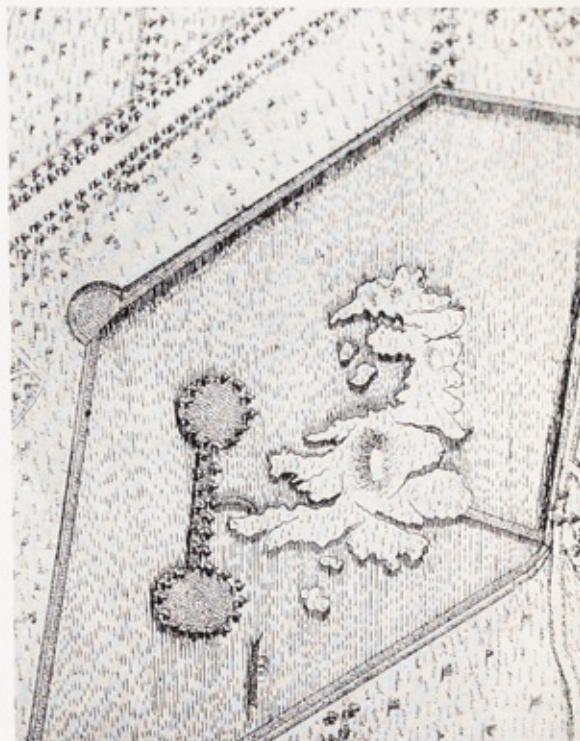


FIG. 18 J. Rocque, detail of island on lake in shape of Great Britain, from 1736 survey of Wanstead House, Essex.

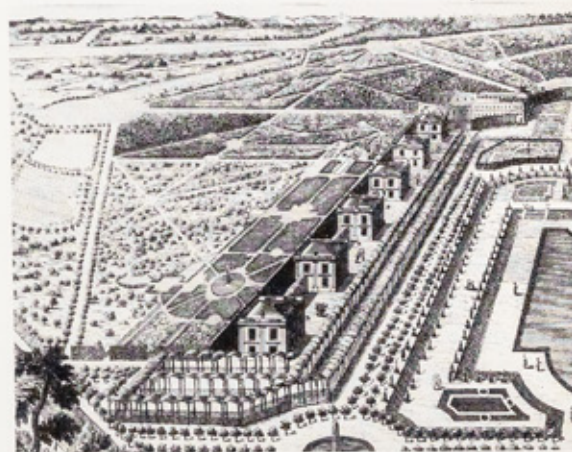


FIG. 19 Detail of the *Bosquet de Louveciennes* at Marly.

18. Betsy Rosasco, 'The Sculptural Decorations of the Garden at Marly: 1679-1699', *Journal of Garden History*, vol. 4, no. 2, pp. 95-125.

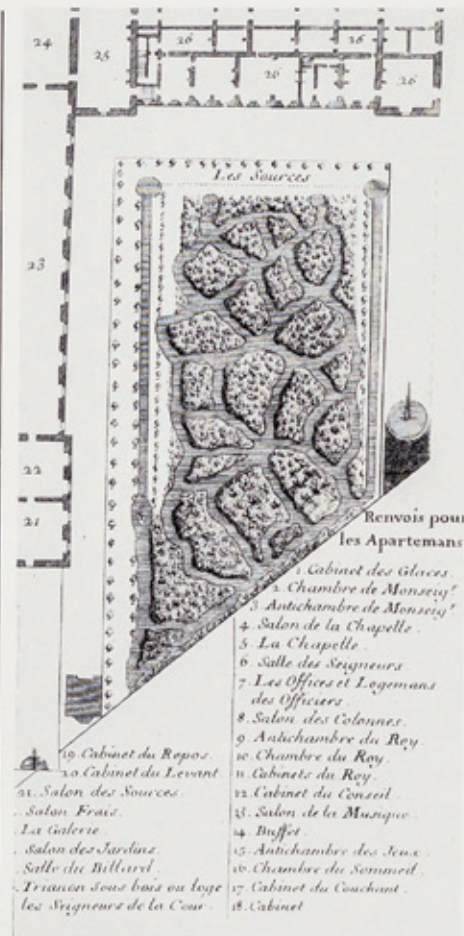


FIG. 20 Detail of the Bosquet des Sources at the Grand Trianon, Versailles.

works filled in with meanders and wiggles. It need only be said in the context of this article that Betsy Rosasco has demonstrated how the form and content of these 1690s alterations in the *Bosquet* were the result of a wish to 'reinvent the gardens of the Augustan Age', and that the combination of formal and informal elements is derived from Pliny's description of ancient Roman gardens.

Mention might be made of one other example of French irregularity, namely the *Bosquet des Sources* (Fig. 20), made in the 1680s to serve the Grand Trianon at Versailles. As its name implies it was the source for the water supply, and the springs were formed into a lake of about 18 islands around which the water wiggled. It was both useful and ornamental, for each island had a table and chair set upon it. Superficially the pattern looks Chinese, and there are analogies with some irregular Chinese gardens with asymmetrical lakes and irregular islands set in them, but the analogy ought not, perhaps, be taken further than this. On the other hand, J. H. Mansart was the designer for both the *Bosquet des Sources* and the *Bosquet de Louveciennes*.

Quite clearly the *Bosquet de Louveciennes* was formed in the belief that it resembled an ancient Roman garden. That this was peculiar to Marly alone is surely proved by the lack of meanders in French gardens in the twenty years following the 1690s. Therefore, it is easy to suggest that France in this one example has priority over England, and that the idea might have been transmitted to this country by George London, or others who had contact with France following the Peace of Ryswick in 1697. However, there is that view of Sir William Temple's garden, undated it is true, but surely showing a layout belonging to the period when Temple wrote his celebrated essay *Upon the Gardens of Epicurus: or, Of Gardening in the Year 1685*, published in 1692. Although Temple doesn't specifically refer to Pliny, nevertheless, he draws upon what he had known of gardens in the ancient world. If his meanders reflect that ancient world, I must leave it to other historians to decide whether he arrived at his solution independently of Louis XIV and his garden-architect J. H. Mansart.