

An Economic History of the English Garden by Roderick Floud

Allen Lane. 416 pages. £25.00.

ISBN: 978-0-241-3557-7.

‘What’s that in today’s money?’ is a question readers of history often ask when sums paid out in the past are mentioned – and in most cases the question remains unanswered. If, in a book on, say, 18th-century landscapes, we find “the Duke spent £900 on statuary for the park,” is this, in modern terms, £9,000 or £9 million? Was it pocket money for the Duke, or

did he have to scrimp on other features to find the money?

More questions arise. What was Capability Brown actually paid as Lord Cobham’s head gardener at Stowe; his salary at the time was £25 with a further £10 for his keep, but what is that worth today? At last there are coherent answers. The doyen of Marxist economic historians, Sir Roderick Floud, has turned his attention to gardens and the result is the magisterial *An Economic History of the English Garden*.

Floud rejects the conventional currency converters, for example, that of the Bank of England, as being unrealistically based on the prices of food and other commodities (in effect, the Retail Price Index) and ignoring the huge drop in prices that occurred as a result of the manufacturing capacity and improved transport brought about by the Industrial Revolution. Floud’s measure takes as its starting point average wages for a given year and compares them with today’s incomes.

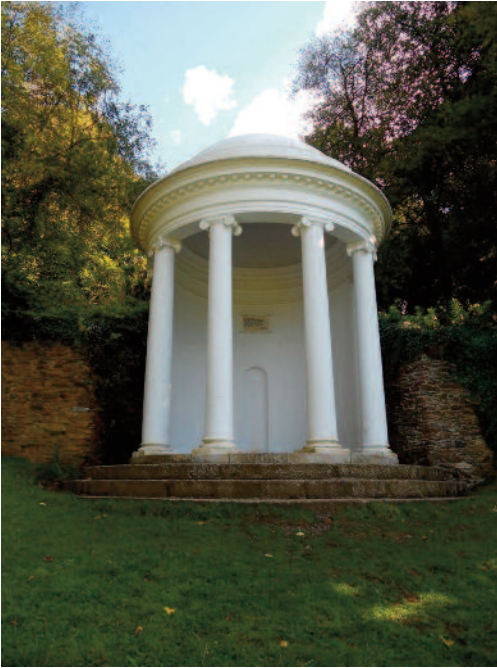
The traditional indices would place Brown’s salary at £3,200 today (patently ludicrous): Floud calculates the much more plausible figure of £45,580. The method is robust – test it with Joseph Paxton at Chatsworth: £65 per annum at Victorian prices, £47,120 today.

This can produce big figures. Baron Ferdinand de Rothschild spent £153,000 on creating the gardens of Waddesdon Manor (which included a prodigious amount of earth moving). In Floud’s terms, this translates to £68.8m. Ridiculous? But wait – the restoration of part of the garden at Alnwick Castle with modern machinery in the early 2000s cost £48m.

This insight gives Floud the tools to evaluate the true cost of our great parks and gardens (public and private, large and small) and to calculate the contribution made by the gardens and all their associated trades to the general economy. The results are surprising. When re-costed in Floud’s terms, it is clear that both landscape architects and nurseries made substantial sums, and that their patrons, originally royal and aristocratic and later more general, were prepared to pay out large amounts for garden designs and the plants to implement them. Designers such as Capability Brown were running major businesses, employing a large labour force and a myriad of sub-contractors and spending their employers’ money freely at nurseries. Floud calculates Brown’s turnover in a good year at over £50m in modern terms.

All this means that today’s enormous garden industry – in the UK we spend annually over £11 billion, and that itself comes to less per head than in France, Italy or Holland – simply mirrors the economic impact of gardens in past ages. This is one of the most important books on garden history in the last half century and, for anyone serious about the subject, it is a Must Buy.

Richard Mawrey



Milton's temple at Mount Edgcombe.

Serious contributions to our knowledge of historic gardens can come from small publishers as well as the major ones. Here are three worthwhile examples. **The English Landscape Garden** by Michael Symes is offered as a companion to the same author's 'The English Landscape Garden in Europe', published in 2016 (reviewed in *N49*). There is little overlap, though, and he has revised his thoughts on the development of the style.

So rooted in the British psyche does the idea of 'the English landscape garden' seem, that it is strange to read that the term was coined only in the 1940s. Symes is interesting on such linguistic implications, and on literary ones, both ancient, particularly Virgil, and more recent – Milton, Pope, Congreve.

Obviously, famous 18th-century landscapes, such as Stowe, are discussed, but one of the strengths of this masterly survey is the inclusion of relatively less well-known places, like Mount Edgcombe and Ugbrooke – all illustrated mostly with the author's own photographs. Symes usefully prolongs his theme

with examples dating from well into the 19th century, and stresses how the style remained a staple of the design of public parks, even after it went out of fashion for private gardens.

Historic England. 96 pages. £20.00. ISBN: 978-1-84802-377-2.

One of Symes's subjects, circuit gardens, is picked up in **Digging Deeper** (edited by Barbara Simms), which consists of seven essays by postgraduate students. They put forward a wide range of subject matter, though sadly none ventures outside England or Scotland. Even Andrew Short's essay on 'The Gardens of the French Gardening Craze, 1908-1914' deals with the astounding popularity of French market gardening systems in England, with only a few paragraphs devoted to explaining what in France was being copied. (Incidentally, 'maraîcher', a market gardener, has a circumflex in French – so why not here?)

Because of my involvement in the restoration of Red Cross Garden in Southwark, an inner-London green space initiated by Octavia Hill, I turned first to Leanne Newman's account of 'How women philanthropists and social reformers used landscape and gardening to improve the lives of the poor, 1850-1910'. Newman admirably condenses the work of her seven chosen women, including Hill, into just ten pages of text, and also gives us the background to their lives and that of the people they aimed to help.

Like these two, the other essays make you want to know more about the subjects. In the current state of UK publishing, scholarly books by new authors are unlikely to find a home, so full marks to the Birkbeck Garden History Group for helping this research see the light of day.

Birkbeck Garden History Group. 76 pages. £18.00. ISBN 978-0-95554414-2-4.

Humphry Repton's bicentenary last year seems to have produced far fewer publications than Capability Brown's tercentenary in 2016, so the Hampshire Gardens Trust's beautifully produced little volume, **Humphry Repton at Herriard Park**, by Sally Miller and others from the HGT, is particularly welcome. Dealing with just one property (Herriard Park lies about 30 miles north of Portsmouth) and for only a short period of time (1793-99), it is a model of what a dedicated group of researchers can add to the sum of information about a wider topic. Herriard is still owned by the Jervoise family, who never threw a scrap of paper away, and its archive is on loan to the Hampshire Record Office, to be explored and mined not just for Repton's work but also for fascinating details, such as that 75 hyacinths cost 3s 6d in 1796.

Hampshire Gardens Trust. 96 pages. £12.00. ISBN 978-1-916910-10-8.

Gillian Mawrey