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Citation: Bawden, D. (2018). 'In this book-making age': Edward Kemp as writer and communicator of horticultural knowledge. *Garden History*, 46(supple), pp. 136-154.

This is the accepted version of the paper.

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DAVID BAWDEN

‘IN THIS BOOK-MAKING AGE’: EDWARD KEMP AS
WRITER AND COMMUNICATOR OF HORTICULTURAL
KNOWLEDGE

*Edward Kemp, although best known as a park superintendent and a designer of parks and gardens, was also an influential and best-selling author. His *How to Lay Out a Garden*, running into several editions, is the best known and most influential of his written works, but there were others, notably editions of the *Hand-book of Gardening and Parks*, *Gardens* etc. of London and its Suburbs, the first ever such regional survey. Kemp assisted Joseph Paxton with the editing of his publications, and was a regular and thoughtful contributor to magazines, most notably the *Gardeners' Chronicle*, where his critiques, such as that of the then new gardens of Biddulph Grange, Staffordshire, received considerable attention. He, along with John Gibson and Edward Milner, was one the protégées of Paxton who did so much for the dissemination of horticultural knowledge, as authors, editors and compilers, in the midst of the nineteenth-century communications revolution. This paper considers Kemp's role and influence as an innovative writer and disseminator, considering the structure, format, content and reception of his published work, his relationship with his publishers, and his place in the Victorian information world.*

‘WHAT A SMALL WORLD IT WAS BECOMING’

It is a salutary axiom, especially in this book-making age, that no volume should be sent before the public without something beyond a private reason for its appearance.¹

He talked of what a small world it was becoming: not just because modern transport could shrink distances but because scholarship had made almost all languages intelligible, and means of communication were revolutionized also. Knowledge, above all, was being transmitted as never before.²

The Victorian communication revolution, through which Edward Kemp and his contemporaries lived, had a dramatic effect on publications and readers. In essence, this revolution involved the application of the technologies of the first Industrial Revolution to the production and dissemination of information in printed documents. Physical transportation of printed materials was transformed by the use of steam.³ Joseph Paxton, with his initial use of canals for many of his early deliveries of large plants to Chatsworth, Derbyshire, his ventures in railways and shipbuilding, and his interests in solving the traffic problems of London, was heavily involved.⁴ Advances in publishing technology, and particularly the application of steam to power printing presses, and new methods for mass production of good-quality illustrations integrated with text (as seen in the changes between the editions of Kemp's well-received *How to Lay Out a Garden*) greatly increased

the number and quality of books and magazines available.⁵ The removal of ‘taxes on knowledge’, stamp duty and paper duty, also contributed,⁶ as did the introduction of universal postal services from 1840,⁷ of which John Claudius Loudon had been an advocate.⁸ A more literate public and workforce was able to take advantage of these developments; by 1839, eighty-three per cent of men and seventy-five per cent of women were considered literate.⁹ Horticultural and gardening writers and editors benefitted greatly from these developments, the prolific pioneer being the man whom Kemp described with good reason as the ‘indefatigable Mr. Loudon’.¹⁰ The purpose of this paper is to consider Kemp’s role as a writer, communicator and disseminator of information, and to set his work in the contexts both of the spreading of horticultural knowledge in the nineteenth century and of the foundation of the modern information society.

The 1850s and 1860s, when Kemp was most active as an author, were at the mid-point of the communications revolution. Mechanized printing had begun four decades earlier with Frederick Koenig’s steam-powered cylinder press of 1812 producing one thousand sheets per hour, and then Augustus Applegath and Edward Cowper’s type-revolving press offering up to eight thousand sheets per hour. Many incremental developments followed up to the introduction of offset printing in the 1870s, which led to ‘the high-water mark’ of British publishing in terms of volume and number of titles.¹¹

Kemp’s main publishers were in the vanguard of these developments. *How to Lay Out a Garden* and his Biddulph pamphlet, as well as his *Gardener’s Chronicle* articles, were published by the London firm Bradbury & Evans, which had also published most of Paxton’s books and magazines. Innovative in terms of printing technology, it was closely associated with the Scottish publisher William Orr, who published the *Magazine of Botany*, in which Kemp’s early articles appeared, and also the *Hand-book of Gardening*. Orr, in turn, was linked to the Edinburgh firm of Chambers, which had pioneered the use of steam presses and steam transportation in publishing.¹² Bradbury & Evans was ‘one of the most efficient printing firms in England, specializing in illustrated magazines with 20 modern steam presses running 24 hours a day’.¹³ It also printed the novels of Charles Dickens, and inserted advertisements for the works of Paxton and Kemp in them.¹⁴ For example, the June issue of Bradbury & Evans’s 1852 serialization of *Bleak House* had a page of advertisements promoting the first edition of *How to Lay Out a Garden* and the tenth edition of the *Hand-book of Gardening*, alongside Jane Loudon’s *Ladies Companion to the Flower Garden*, ladies bonnets, tea, hair dye and a savoury sauce.¹⁵ We may presume that Kemp began his association with Bradbury & Evans because of the company’s involvement with Paxton, who was a personal friend of the proprietors, and his publications benefitted from their production by a company in the forefront of advances in the information environment.

It is also worth noting that the Victorian communications revolution issued in what we understand today as an information society. This has been explained by the sociologist Frank Webster as a society in which abstract theoretical knowledge, recorded and communicated in document, achieves an importance as the main guide to practical action, as opposed to tradition, tacit knowledge and pragmatic ‘rules of thumb’.¹⁶ Kemp and his contemporaries played a major part in establishing horticulture and landscape design on this basis and conveyed their ideas to a wide public through the newest technologies for communicating useful information. It may not be unreasonable to regard Kemp, apart from his other accomplishments, as among the pioneers of the information society.

‘AN ABLE AND USEFUL MAN’

Kemp’s life, and his work and influence as park superintendent and designer of parks and gardens are well covered by other authors.¹⁷ He was also, most importantly for this

paper, a well-known and very influential writer, regarded as an arbiter of good taste, an author of books – most notably *How to Lay Out a Garden* – and a regular contributor to horticultural magazines. Indeed, his obituary in the *Birkenhead News and Wirral General Advertiser* in March 1891 noted that ‘his literary ability was of a high order, as the eminence of his professional writings attest, and yet withal he was thoroughly practical’, before mentioning his work as a designer.¹⁸ Frank Waugh, in his preface for the posthumous American edition of *How to Lay Out a Garden*, considered that the book would certainly be ‘his most enduring memorial’.¹⁹

Kemp was active at a time when an enthusiasm for self-education for gardeners, and for the diffusion of practical knowledge generally, was at its height, and when social changes were leading to a greatly increased demand for advice and instruction on gardening matters. It was, as noted above, a period when the communications revolution of the mid-nineteenth century was in full swing, establishing the foundations of our modern information society. The way in which Kemp took advantage of this nexus of opportunity is the focus of this paper.

‘NO MORE WITHOUT BOOKS THAN WITHOUT TOOLS’

Two particular influences on the environment in which Kemp began his career need to be considered in order to understand how he developed as a writer and a disseminator of horticultural knowledge, and to contextualize his contributions. The first is generic, the second more specific. First, Kemp began his horticultural career at a time when there was a great and growing enthusiasm for spreading horticultural knowledge both for the self-improvement of professional gardeners and for the benefit of a greatly expanded community of owners of, by the standards of the time, small gardens. Paxton and Kemp had both had limited formal education, but they developed a remarkable fluency for writing, and in Paxton’s case for public speaking as well. Paxton studied botanical books avidly, using the libraries at Chatsworth and at the Horticultural Society,²⁰ and passed his knowledge on: ‘largely self-taught, Paxton always encouraged the young gardeners (who included John Gibson, Edward Milner, Edward Kemp, and George Eyles) to study and improve themselves’.²¹

This mindset owed much to Loudon, regarded as an inspiration by both Paxton and Kemp, who argued that ‘a gardener can no more acquire his profession without books than he can without tools’,²² that all gardeners should read widely and keep a daily journal,²³ and that a journeyman gardener should have ‘spent his days and nights reading books connected to his profession’.²⁴ Loudon was also actively involved in initiatives for what was termed the ‘Diffusion of Useful Knowledge’ extending far beyond horticulture, particularly through the work of the improvement societies and mechanics institutes.²⁵ Gardeners were among the first to be involved, observing Loudon’s injunction that all young gardeners should read and study. According to George Chadwick:

it is significant that early nineteenth century gardening publications all carry numerous articles dealing with ‘Self-Instruction for Young Gardeners’, ‘self-improvement’ and the like, in which budding horticulturalists are urged to attend to a wide variety of pursuits from temperance to literary composition, from botany to studying Sir Uvedale Price.²⁶

Paxton himself provided such advice to young gardeners in his *Magazine of Botany* in 1839,²⁷ and one of the last articles in his *Horticultural Register*, assumed to written by him, offers advice to young gardeners.²⁸ As well as knowing relevant geology, chemistry, meteorology, botany and plant physiology, they should know botanical names, and the classification systems of Carl Linnaeus and Antoine-Laurent Jussieu. They should

read poetry to learn the rules of composition and keep a diary to record the year's observations. Certainly, the gardeners at Chatsworth were encouraged to keep diaries for their own improvement, noting inter alia new plant arrivals, weather fluctuations and daily activities.²⁹

To support all this reading, garden libraries were created,³⁰ particularly by the garden improvement societies espoused by Loudon, and there was also the emerging public library system from 1850, although, as Caroline Ikin points out, most libraries were in urban areas, inaccessible to many gardeners.³¹ Loudon's own library at Porchester Terrace was described by a visitor in 1844 shortly after his death as 'filled to over-flowing with most of the works on horticulture, botany, etc. of the present century', while he also provided a library for his gardeners in a glass-fronted bookcase.³² To provide the requisite material, there was also a burgeoning horticultural literature, with the many innovations in horticulture and landscape design, as well as a greater variety of plant materials available giving the subject a much wider and deeper knowledge base, presented in a wider variety of forms of document. These included the following:

- Horticultural books, journals and magazines, aimed at both professionals and amateurs.³³
- Coverage of horticultural news in newspapers and general magazines, an example being the extensive coverage in the local and national press of the design and opening of the Sheffield Botanic Gardens.³⁴ The *Illustrated London News* was a key periodical for parks news.³⁵
- Newspaper gardening columns, the first of which appeared in *Lloyd's Weekly Newspaper* in 1852.³⁶
- Documentation produced by horticultural societies, national and local, amateur, professional and learned.³⁷
- A variety of catalogues of plants in gardens, and nurseries' plant lists and seed catalogues.³⁸
- Reference works, including flora, dictionaries, classification and taxonomies, and particularly driven by the need for information about new plants.³⁹

Kemp, therefore, established his career in what was an information-rich environment, with a wide range of documents types established or emerging, for professional gardeners themselves as well as for garden owners, who both took full advantage of it, and contributed to it.

Second, and more specifically, Kemp was one of the pupils and protégés of Paxton, in company with his co-workers at Chatsworth, in particular Edward Milner and John Gibson, but also George Eyles and J. C. Niven. Jointly, they had a great influence on Victorian parks and gardens: 'Dominating Victorian park design, [Paxton's] students, Milner, Gibson, and Kemp, became the most successful of the second-generation landscape designers of the age.'⁴⁰ The three have also been generally recognized as the leading Victorian park designers after Paxton by both scholarly and popular writers.⁴¹ Thomas Mawson writing a generation later than Kemp linked him with Paxton, Milner, Robert Marnock and Edward Thomas as those who most advanced garden design in their time.⁴² In the case of Kemp, this status was due to his writings as much as to his works, if indeed it is sensible to separate the two synergistic aspects. Kemp was identified, like Paxton, as a prolific designer and writer.⁴³ He did not produce any dictionaries, flora or monographs on particular genus or species, or edit horticultural magazines, or write for and promote newspapers and general magazines, as Paxton did.⁴⁴ Though not such a prolific and diverse author and editor as Paxton, and Loudon before him even more

so, and Andrew Jackson Downing in the United States, Kemp was, in several ways, particularly innovative and influential as a writer and information disseminator, focusing on explaining principles, and critiquing examples, of landscape design, both public and private.

Although all Paxton's protégés had some involvement with the communication and transmission of horticultural information, none did so to the same extent as Kemp. Milner did not leave a body of writing, though he passed on his knowledge in a different way, partly through his direction of the Crystal Palace School of Gardening.⁴⁵ His son, Henry Ernest Milner, also a landscape gardener, produced the well-regarded *Art and Practice of Landscape Gardening* (1890), six years after his father's death, and based to a great extent on his practice.⁴⁶ This book, many of whose recommendations seem rather Kemp-like, was described by Brent Elliott as presenting a modified version of Paxton's heroic vision, with the landscape gardener 'a counterpart to creative nature, transforming the landscape through an understanding of the underlying principle of geological change'.⁴⁷ Richard Bisgrove, less charitably, regarded it as 'unexceptional and utterly characteristic of its time'.⁴⁸ The book's preface makes it plain how much the younger Milner considered that he followed his father, and Paxton before him, confirming Elliott's view that the book matches the father's practice more than the son's. To this extent, the book may be seen as something of a delayed equivalent to Kemp's *How to Lay Out a Garden*.

Gibson had been first drawn to Paxton's attention when he submitted an article to the *Horticultural Register*, which was published in October 1832.⁴⁹ However, he also wrote relatively little, though he actively assisted Paxton with several of his publishing ventures. The horticultural journals were of particularly significance in the Victorian gardening information system, most being edited and written by working gardeners rather than by professional authors and editors. As Joan Morgan and Alison Richards point out:

editing and contributing to the journals not only helped gardeners establish their credentials and demonstrate their authority but it was also an important way of advancing and setting standards in a field that had no formal organization. It must also have provided a useful extra income.⁵⁰

It was often the way, as with Gibson, for a young gardener to be noticed; so it was with Kemp.

Kemp assisted Paxton for some years in the 1840s with his publications;⁵¹ having moved back to London, he acted as a local liaison between Paxton and his publishers.⁵² A letter of July 1843 from Kemp to Paxton in the Chatsworth archives, accompanying the proofs of the August edition of Paxton's *Magazine of Botany*, notes that Kemp has advised a contributor 'to confine his articles to flowering plants, and not to say so much about fruits'.⁵³ He was involved with Paxton's gardening publications to the extent that he became known as Paxton's amanuensis.⁵⁴ By 1849, however, Kemp was contributing articles to the *Magazine of Botany* on a variety of topics, including the planting of ornamental trees and shrubs, designing new plantations and improving old ones, and offering hints about hardy annuals.⁵⁵ In the following year, he was writing in the *Gardener's Chronicle*, advising on the making of gravel walks,⁵⁶ and correcting the idea that he laid out Princes Park, Liverpool, giving the credit to Milner.⁵⁷ It was at this point Kemp became established as an author, first through his instructional books, and *How to Lay Out a Garden* in particular, and then through his surveys of gardens in London and at Biddulph Grange, Staffordshire. The income from writing may well have been an incentive, as his first books appeared at a time when he was receiving no salary for his duties as park superintendent due to the financial problems of the late 1840s.⁵⁸

'THE EMINENCE OF HIS PROFESSIONAL WRITINGS'

Kemp's private clients were typically the suburban middle-class: those who lived in 'places which, with the spread of the railways, could easily be reached from some large town'.⁵⁹ That this was also his intended audience for his writings is clear from the preface to the first edition of *How to Lay Out a Garden*:

Having spent a good deal of time in passing through the suburbs of large towns (particularly the metropolis) [I have] been very much impressed with the incongruity and dullness observable in the majority of small gardens [...] how few there are among the middle classes who do not possess a small garden.⁶⁰

This clear delineation of the intended audience for his writings marks Kemp out from most of his contemporaries.

Kemp's writings, synergistic with his design practice, spread his style much further. Although his intended audience was 'a prosperous part of the suburban market', his writings extended this.⁶¹ The style of Kemp, and Loudon and Paxton before him, had an 'impact [...] now extending down to the lowest classes'.⁶² However, Kemp was not writing for a true mass audience, which had not yet developed. As Simon Heffer puts it:

before about 1880 most publications, whether books or journals, were by tone and content aimed at a social or intellectual elite. A true golden age of the popular press lay ahead, starting in the three decades before the Great War.⁶³

But even so, the audience for the writings of Kemp and his contemporaries was much wider than that for the previous generation of gardening writers (Figure 1).

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Figure 1. Part of the table of contents from Edward Kemp, *Hand-book of Gardening*, 11th edn (London: Bradbury & Evans, 1855), p. xii (detail)

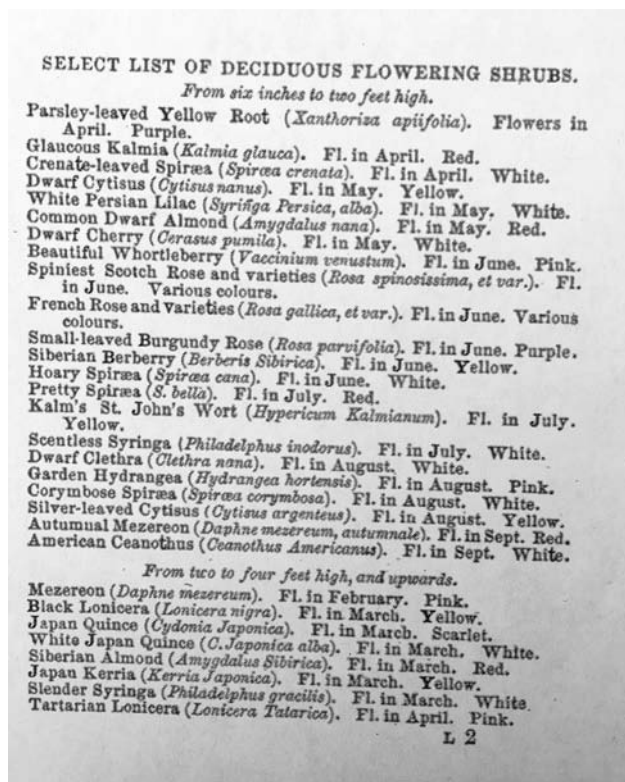


Figure 2. Part of a plant list from Edward Kemp, *Hand-book of Gardening*, 11th edn (London: Bradbury & Evans, 1855), p. 113 (detail)

Kemp's first major text was Bradbury & Evans's long-standing *Hand-book of Gardening: for the use of all persons who possess a garden of limited extent*: he edited the tenth (1850) and eleventh (1855) editions.⁶⁴ This was a work of practical instruction, encompassing basic botany and plant physiology, principles of cultivation and crop rotation, pests and diseases, detailed instructions for growing a variety of flowers, fruit and vegetables, lists of recommended plants, and a garden calendar. The table of contents would not look too outdated in a publication of the present day. The audience for this book was clearly stated, and much the same as that for *How to Lay Out a Garden*. The introduction to the eleventh edition describes it as 'not intended for the initiated few, but for the inquiring many [...] the most respectable classes of amateur gardeners' (Figure 2).⁶⁵ Kemp's best-known book appeared at the same time. Going into three editions (with a fourth posthumous and greatly amended American edition), it was, and is, generally known as *How to Lay Out a Garden*, although the title of the first edition was *How to Lay Out a Small Garden*.

The first three editions were published by Bradbury & Evans, London.⁶⁶ A fourth, appearing twenty years after Kemp's death with a substantially different title, was extensively revised and adapted for North America by Frank A. Waugh, and published by John Wiley of New York, which had reprinted earlier editions for the American market.⁶⁷ The title changed subtly over the three British editions. The first (1850) edition was titled *How to Lay Out a Small Garden: intended as a guide to amateurs in choosing, forming, or improving a place, from a quarter of an acre to thirty acres in extent, with reference to both design and execution*. For the second (1858) edition, the restrictions of 'small' and 'amateurs' had been dropped from the title, and the 'estate' could now be larger: *How to Lay Out a Garden: intended as a general guide in choosing, forming, or improving an estate, from a quarter of an acre to a hundred acres in extent, with reference to both*

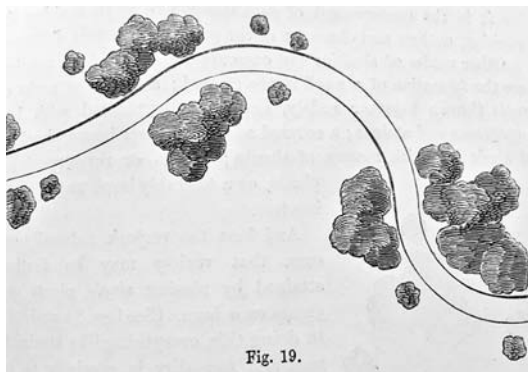


Figure 3. Example of an illustration from Edward Kemp, *How to Lay Out a Garden*, 3rd edn (London: Bradbury & Evans, 1864), p. 69, fig. 19

design and execution, and the edition was noted as *greatly enlarged, and illustrated with numerous plans, sections, and sketches of gardens and garden objects*. The third edition (1864) retained the same title, adding only that it contained *numerous additional plans*.

Pagination of the three editions increased from two hundred and thirty-four to four hundred and three and then to four hundred and twenty-eight, as did the size of the pages also, from the small pocket-book-sized first edition. The considerable increase from the first to second editions is accounted for by the inclusions of many more illustrations, plans and examples of gardens from Kemp's design practice; the smaller increase from the second to the third edition is due to extra illustrations and to the provision of a detailed index. The third edition was 'a comprehensive volume of some four hundred pages illustrated from forty or so private gardens laid out by Kemp himself, mostly in the north and west',⁶⁸ 'Reptonian designs by his own hand' (Figure 3).⁶⁹ The price of the first edition was relatively modest, being advertised in June 1852 at three shillings and sixpence, with the tenth edition of *Hand-book of Gardening* at two shillings.⁷⁰ At the same time, Jane Loudon's *Ladies Companion to the Flower Garden* cost seven shillings, John Lindley's *Elements of Botany* twelve shillings, and Paxton's *Botanical Directory* sixteen shillings. For comparison, a new novel cost about one pound, and even when subsequently sold in poorer bindings for a mass market, would not have been cheaper than Kemp's books (Figure 4).⁷¹

In the preface to the first edition of *How to Lay Out a Garden*, Kemp writes that he intended to illustrate his writing with woodcuts, but that this would have greatly increased the price of the book.⁷² But the demands for illustration were so great that the preface to the second edition notes that engravings of illustrations and plans are included, but that has necessitated more text, so that the book is half as long again, and the price greatly increased. The third edition had still more woodcuts and accompanying text, as they were so well-received. Kemp also noted in his first edition that he had considered including lists of suitable plants, but refrained from doing so as this would have increased the length of the book unduly, and such lists were readily available elsewhere.⁷³ He did not change this decision in later editions, although the third edition did offer list of plants for some of the illustrated designs (Figure 5).

The first two editions of *How to Lay Out a Garden* had no index, but the third had a detailed subject index, running to eighteen pages, which Kemp noted in the preface as 'a very comprehensive and carefully prepared alphabetic index [to be] of value in facilitating reference to the various topics'.⁷⁴ Provision of such an index was not usual in horticultural books of that time, although it was common in magazines such as *Gardener's Chronicle*: of the three contemporary books discussed below, Joshua Major's *Theory and Practice of Landscape Gardening* had no index, Charles Smith's *Parks and Pleasure Grounds* had a rudimentary four-page index, while Charles M'Intosh's *Book*

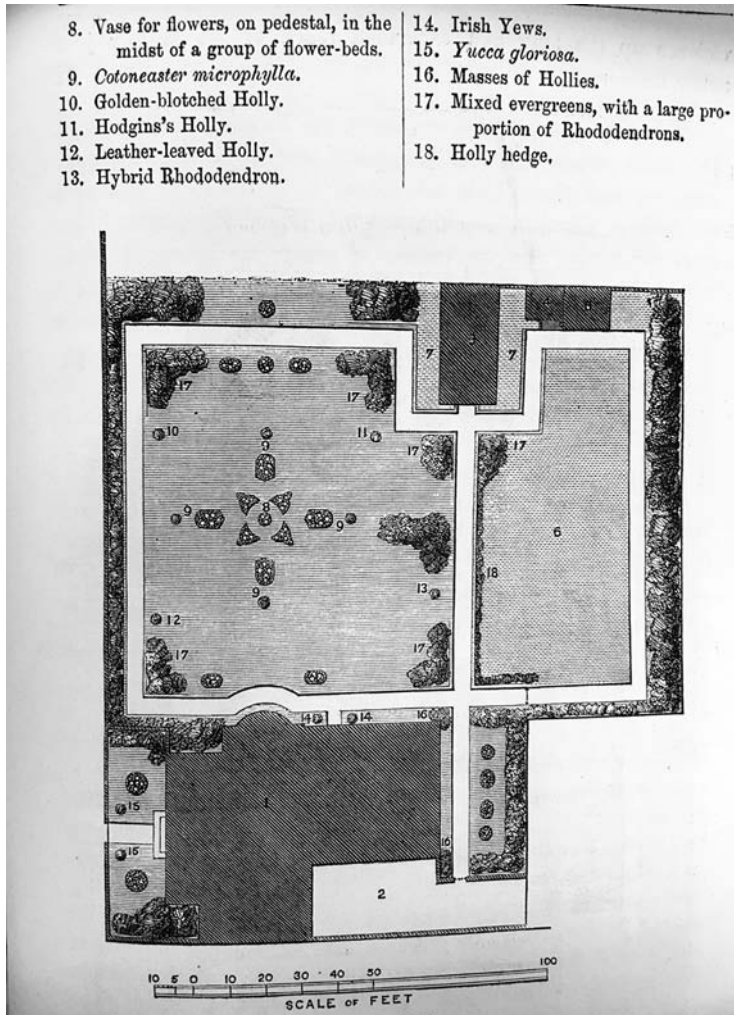


Figure 4. Example of a scaled plan; from Edward Kemp, *How to Lay Out a Garden*, 3rd edn (London: Bradbury & Evans, 1864), p. 351

of the Garden had a detailed twenty-one-page index. Its inclusion in the third edition, whether it was Kemp or his publisher who decided on it, is an example of the increasingly sophisticated documentation practices in Kemp's works. It was appreciated by a reviewer, who mentioned the 'capital index, which is of itself a great recommendation'.⁷⁵

The structure of the book remained largely unchanged throughout the editions, with four distinct sections: preliminary considerations; what to avoid; what to attain; and practical directions. The first dealt with matters such as soil, aspect and views. The second addressed errors such as attempting too much, superfluous planting, cutting down too many trees, too great a mixture of styles, extreme formality and 'tricks for surprising people'. The third was divided into four chapters: general principles, such as simplicity and convenience; general objects, such as flower borders, undergrowth and walks; particular objects, such as trees and hedgerows; and special departments, such as rock-gardens, rose gardens, seaside gardens and suburban gardens. The fourth dealt with practical issues such as drainage and planting. For the most part, the changes over the editions were largely the addition of extra materials and examples, though his views had to an extent changed by the third edition,⁷⁶ which featured material derived from his

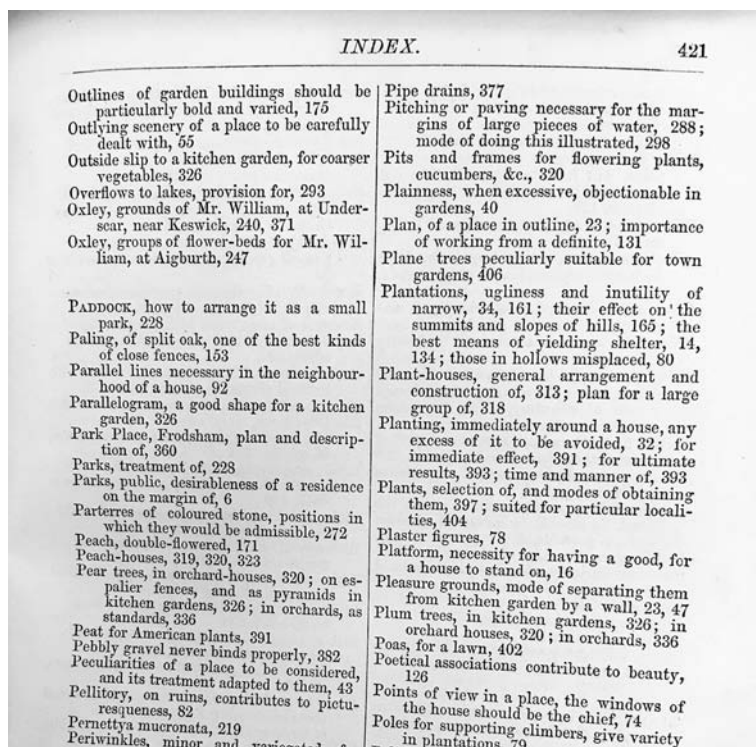


Figure 5. Part of the index from Edward Kemp, *How to Lay Out a Garden*, 3rd edn (London: Bradbury & Evans, 1864), p. 421 (detail)

reflections on Biddulph Grange, and on attaining congruence of disparate parts.

It may be said that *How to Lay Out a Garden* succeeded Loudon's *Suburban Gardener and Villa Companion* as the most prominent horticultural book of its time, in the same way that his mentor Paxton's *Gardener's Chronicle* succeeded Loudon's *Gardener's Magazine* as the most influential periodical and was 'a highly successful book [...] perhaps the most representative of all Victorian books on garden design'.⁷⁷ It became an important influence on the High Victorian mixed style, which Kemp termed the 'gardenesque', and which Tom Turner notes as 'a variety of features and types of gardens, assembled like works of art in a gallery, or books in a library'.⁷⁸ In a popular BBC book, Jane Owen and Diarmuid Gavin write that the Victorian:

eclectic mixture of styles became known as 'gardenesque' thanks to Edward Kemp's book *How to lay out a small garden* which appeared in 1850. The term had been first used by Loudon in 1832 to describe a garden in which each plant was singly to display its full potential. In Kemp's book, however, the expression was applied to garden layout, rather than to the nature of the planting, referring to a mixture of styles without any unifying themes, and it was Kemp's use of the word that caught on.⁷⁹

Elliott had suggested previously that Kemp simply ignored the earlier popular meaning of gardenesque, as Loudon had used it, and his usage was adopted by others, including M'Intosh and Shirley Hibberd.⁸⁰ Elliott somewhat laments that Robert Thompson's more precise term 'free symmetrical' was not adopted instead, but one has to say that Kemp's purloining of a popular term was effective in disseminating his views. Kemp followed Loudon, and Repton before him, in recognizing three principal kinds of style in landscape gardening: the geometrical, the 'mixed, middle or irregular style', and the picturesque; he chose the mixed style as most appropriate for the kind of landscapes

he designed and outlined his approach at increasing length in the three editions.⁸¹ This style ‘spread all over the suburbs of England, perhaps as a result of Edward Kemp’s book getting into the hands of what he called “the multitude”’.⁸² George Plumptre notes that popularity of the book confirmed the extent to which gardening was becoming increasingly popular among the middle-class.⁸³

Kemp believed, and emphasized through the book, that the garden is for ‘comfort and convenience and luxury, and use’ and not, as others like Smith considered, for education and instruction.⁸⁴ However, he was quick to praise the geological museum within the gardens of Biddulph Grange as ‘at once the most simple and complete lesson in practical geology that could be imagined’.⁸⁵ Other unchanging principles throughout the editions were: that a garden is a work of art, not an imitation of nature; that although there may be principles to be set out, there is no prescription as to how a garden should be; that styles should not be mixed within the garden, but there should be a clear demarcation between formality near the house, and naturalness further away; that inauthenticity should be avoided, such as the use of coloured gravels in a flower garden; and that it is best to be modest, rather than attempting too much.

Kemp’s book, in its first edition, was one of a number of British publications of the 1850s that espoused and extended Loudon’s ideas.⁸⁶ indeed, Kemp himself identified it as a development of some of the ideas in Loudon’s writings on suburban gardening.⁸⁷ In the United States, the three editions (1841, 1844, 1849) of Andrew Jackson Downing’s *Treatise on the Theory and Practice of Landscape Gardening, Adapted to North America* played a comparable role.⁸⁸ Reviewing and comparing some of the British texts, Elliott concluded that ‘of all these writers [of the mid-Victorian period] only Edward Kemp had a decisive influence on gardening style’.⁸⁹ Space does not permit a detailed and systematic comparison of these works, but some remarks can be made.

These publications were initiated by an extensive series of articles in the *Gardener’s Chronicle* by John Lindley in 1847–48, which developed his influential perspective on the history and theory of landscape gardening.⁹⁰ There followed three roughly equivalent and contemporary books. Smith, in his *Parks and Pleasure Grounds* (1852), largely developed Loudon’s ideas of the gardenesque, though his conception of the public park is very close to that of Kemp.⁹¹ Smith, like Kemp, advocated the fundamental principle that different styles within the garden should not be mixed; in a private garden, there should be formality near the house, and a more natural treatment further away. Unlike Kemp, Smith wanted to include instruction as well as pleasure in public parks, as was often a concern for Victorian designers and theorists, and would have planted an arboretum or collection of useful hardy plants for that purpose.⁹² Major’s *The Theory and Practice of Landscape Gardening* (1852) espoused Loudon’s modifications of Repton, again using Loudon’s conception of the gardenesque, and Paxton’s modifications of Loudon.⁹³ Finally, there is M’Intosh’s *The Book of the Garden* (1853) that Elliott regards as ‘one of the more successful horticultural textbooks’.⁹⁴ Turner identifies Kemp and M’Intosh as the two writers who succeeded Loudon as popular authors on garden design.⁹⁵ We might conclude, on the basis of contemporary critiques noted below, that Kemp’s writing has a particular influence because of its balance of aesthetic and practical considerations, and also because of its focus on the needs of one particular audience: owners of, by the standards of the time, small gardens.

‘A SAFE AND USEFUL GUIDE’

For reasons of space, it is not possible to enumerate all the responses to, and comments on, *How to Lay Out a Garden*. Nor is it feasible to provide a formal analysis in terms of reception theory.⁹⁶ Rather, a sample of responses to the work will be presented, from

immediate reception of the first edition to the present day, as an illustration of how response varied over time, and was inevitable influenced by conceptions, and misconceptions, of Kemp's mid-Victorian context.

The influence was immediate. Writing of Kemp's essays on Biddulph Grange in 1856 and 1865, Elliott remarks that he 'was by this time the acclaimed author of *How to Lay Out a Small Garden*, and his words had weight'.⁹⁷ Reviewers of each edition were enthusiastic. A reviewer of the first edition praised it for being practical, saying how work should be done, as well as how effects might be produced, describing it as 'a well-timed and excellent little work' and 'a safe and useful guide'.⁹⁸ The third edition was described as 'indispensable' and the reviewer doubted if 'there is [another book] that contains so much useful information and practical details [...] as are to found in this unpretending volume'.⁹⁹ The book was quickly referred to in other publications, M'Intosh quoting it extensively and approvingly on rockwork in his 1853 book.¹⁰⁰

In reply to 'A Subscriber', who asked for advice on books on landscape gardening and horticultural chemistry, available relatively cheaply, *The Gardener* (March 1870) responded that Kemp's book, together with *How Crops Grow*, 'are likely to suit you, although, like most works of this character, they are rather high in price'.¹⁰¹ Kemp's book, they said, would cost about fifteen shillings, a considerable increase over the price of the, admittedly much smaller, first edition noted above.¹⁰² While the impact of the book was greatest in Britain and the United States, it was noted worldwide: the second and third editions of Kemp's book were also widely available in Australia and helped Kemp's version of the gardenesque to be become established there.¹⁰³

In a list of thirty-eight 'good and useful gardening books' suggested in 1896 as the basis for a garden library by Frederick William Burbidge, the curator of Trinity College Garden in Dublin, the third edition of *How to Lay Out a Garden* appears among those recommended as 'general works of reference'.¹⁰⁴ Elliott notes that Burbidge did not suggest Milner's more recent *Art and Practice of Landscape Gardening*, 'testimony to the value of Kemp's work as practical manual'.¹⁰⁵ Mawson, in his *Art and Craft of Garden Making* of 1900, wrote that Kemp, by his writings and works, did much to heal a perceived breach between architects and garden designers, drawing attention to this as a main influence of *How to Lay Out a Garden*, which he described as 'a most excellent book', and quoting Kemp's opinion that the two professions should always work in unity from the start of a commission.¹⁰⁶ Dean Hole, though he dedicated his *Our Gardens* (1901) to William Robinson and appeared to espouse a Robinsonian approach to garden design, nonetheless recommended Kemp, along with Loudon's *Encyclopaedia* and Paxton's *Botanical Dictionary*, as the more useful books of an earlier generation and quoted Kemp on the need to harmonize the disparate parts of the garden into a whole.¹⁰⁷

As with much of Victorian attitudes and culture, Kemp's writings passed into something of a shade in later decades, though he was not entirely forgotten. Harry Roberts's little book on *English Gardens*, one of an extensive series published during the Second World War (1939–45) to extol the virtues of all things British, noted Kemp as the author of 'another popular handbook' in the tradition of Loudon, showing 'the interpretation being given to the term "landscape gardening" by practical men, and accepted by an increasing section of the public'.¹⁰⁸ Indeed, he quoted from Kemp more fully than from any other author other than Loudon, particularly on privacy and seclusion, and on the need to avoid of extremes. Geoffrey Taylor, writing in the early 1950s, noted Kemp's books simply as giving 'detailed instructions' on garden layout, exemplifying this by quoting his advice on the pinetum.¹⁰⁹

Many recent writers on garden history and garden design in the latter part of the twentieth century simply ignored Kemp. Others have not taken his writing very seriously,

particularly in his advice for private gardens. Laurence Fleming and Alan Gore show this particularly strongly:

He seems to have been a modest man, with excellent intentions, and it is sad to think that his gardens, if one is to judge from the plans he offers, must have been unsatisfactory to look at in almost every way [...] one may wonder what the gardens of Edward Kemp actually looked like. In general, they had a solemnity which can be accepted, on the one hand, as seriousness of a very high order, or, on the other hand, as evidence of a total lack of humour [...] a recipe for total gloom, but it seems to have been acceptable to a generation that took mourning very seriously.¹¹⁰

Rather remarkably, they suggest that Kemp owes nothing to Paxton, a strange contrast to the more general view that Kemp, with Milner and Gibson, may have adapted Paxton's style, but were generally reliant on it as the basis of their practice, and – in Kemp's case – his writings.¹¹¹ However, they make a fairer judgement in saying of Kemp that 'his style was so entirely typical of what we now think of as a Victorian garden that it is tempting to think of him as its sole source'.¹¹² That we think so must in large part be due to the influence of his books.

Other, more recent writers, as though at a loss as to how to deal with Kemp, have chosen to focus on certain, somewhat idiosyncratically chosen, aspects. Thus, Anthea Taigel and Tom Williamson imply that he was somewhat snobbish, taking his criticism of 'cockney gardens' as typical of writers of the period.¹¹³ Bisgrove, quoting from the second edition, suggested that Kemp gave only limited practical advice as to how to achieve the desired effect, and focuses on his advice on choosing a middle course between attainment of originality and avoidance of eccentricity.¹¹⁴ Fleming and Gore also focus on his advice on what to avoid.¹¹⁵ David Stuart, though acknowledging that Kemp's was 'a popular work [which] went through many editions and clearly filled a great need', describes the book as 'deeply unimaginative', though his only specific criticism of Kemp criticizes 'in a very superior way' the 'mere cockneyisms' of some rockeries.¹¹⁶

In recent years, a more balanced approach has emerged, starting with Elliott's influential reassessment in his *Victorian Gardens* (1986), and Kemp began to be recommended to 'the multitude' again.¹¹⁷ Ethne Clarke used a quotation from Kemp, on the appropriate use of artistic effects in the vicinity of the house, to introduce her book on the making of the Hidcote garden.¹¹⁸ Elizabeth Banks similarly invoked Kemp in her book on the creation of period-style gardens, particularly in respect of rock gardens, and the use of sculpture.¹¹⁹ Roy Strong in a popular book of designs for small gardens reflecting various periods of garden design referred to Kemp for his plan of a rose garden to exemplify the mid-Victorian period.¹²⁰ That Kemp is coming back into fashion again is perhaps a further illustration of Elliott's contention that all novel gardening styles owe their origins to the past.¹²¹

'THIS CAPRICIOUS CRITIC'

Kemp contributed notes on the gardens of London to a general London guidebook, *London and its Vicinity Exhibited in 1851*, edited and published by John Weale of High Holborn, London.¹²² A revised version of an existing guide, produced for visitors to the Great Exhibition, this was one of the first mass-market guides to London.¹²³ These notes were expanded to a full publication, *The Parks, Gardens etc. of London and its Suburbs, described and illustrated for the guidance of strangers*, published by Weale also in 1851.¹²⁴ Kemp's claim in the preface of 'no other book of the kind here attempted yet being in existence' suggests that he was the first to present a comprehensive guide to the gardens of London, if not of any city. After a general description of the topography

and flora of the London region, eighty-one sites are examined: twenty public parks, nine public gardens, thirty-one private gardens and twenty-one nurseries. A generous definition of London's suburbs is taken, as sites in Bagshot, Virginia Water, Windsor and Woking are included. The descriptions are concise, most places getting fewer than two pages, although the likes of Kew and Windsor are given considerably more; there are very few illustrations (Figure 6).

Kemp's treatment, generally positive and characteristic of the calm and measured style that he was developing, avoided both the obsequiousness and the vitriol found in some writing of the period. He liked the finish and neatness of Regent's Park and Marnock's design of the Botanic Gardens within it, the trees of Greenwich Park and Clapham Common, the flowers of Temple Gardens, and the park scenery of Windsor. He was at times critical, but reasonably so. He did not like the formal surrounds of the Palm House at Kew and regretted the impoverished appearance of the Chelsea Physic Garden. He was most severely critical of Victoria Park, where 'everything about the execution of the work has been done in the worst possible manner', but was confident that the newly appointed John Gibson would put things right.¹²⁵

This pioneering guide was soon followed by others, for example, Alexander McKenzie's *The Parks, Open Spaces and Thoroughfares of London* (1869), which was notable for its severe criticism of Hyde Park, and which was still being quoted decades later.¹²⁶ Alicia Amherst in *London Parks and Gardens* (1907) takes up his criticism of Victoria Park:

The first laying out of the Park does not seem to have been altogether satisfactory. A writer in 1851 criticises it very severely. The roads and paths, he says, were so badly laid as to require almost reconstruction. The 'banks of the lake must be reduced to something like shape to resist the wash of the water' and the modelling of the plantations will be

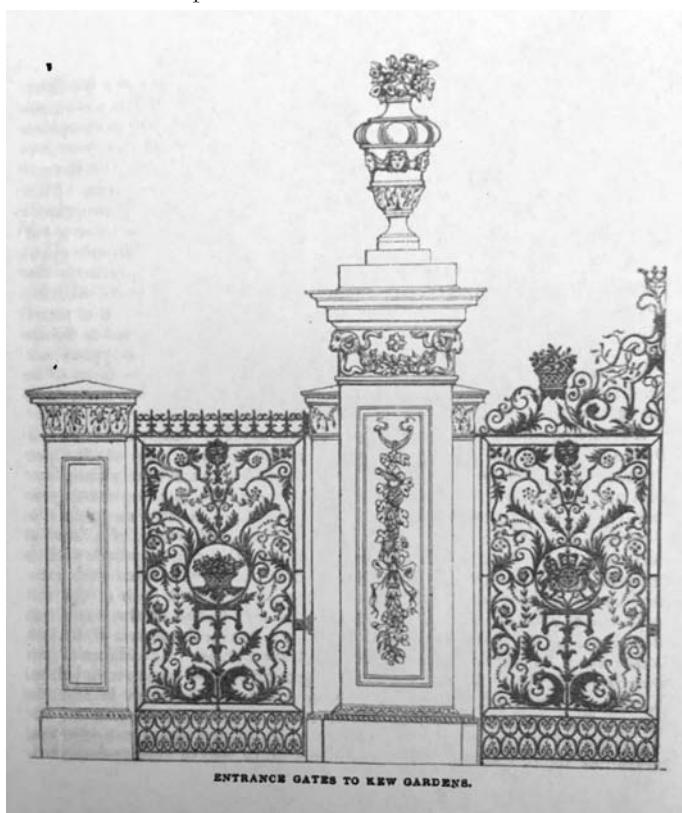


Figure 6. 'Entrance gates to Kew Gardens', one of the few images in Edward Kemp, *The Parks, Gardens etc. of London and its Suburbs* (London: Weale, 1851) (detail)

‘a work of time’. Just then Mr. Gibson assumed the charge of the Park, and even this capricious critic seems to have been well satisfied that he had ‘begun in real earnest’ to carry out the necessary improvements.¹²⁷

This is (mis)quoting Kemp, and it seems a little hard to call him capricious.

The second of Kemp’s influential critiques relates to a specific garden, Biddulph Grange. Kemp publicized and critiqued the gardens newly laid out by E. W. Cooke for the owner, James Bateman, in a series of articles with plans and drawings in *Gardener’s Chronicle* in 1856 and 1862.¹²⁸ Subsequently, using a publishing tactic now common but then rather innovative, Kemp’s publishers produced an abridged version of these articles in a twenty-six-page pamphlet.¹²⁹ His analysis of Biddulph, which affected his later works, and markedly changed the content and structure of the third edition of his book, have been analysed in detail by Elliott and related to the restored Biddulph gardens.¹³⁰ As well as commenting on many individual elements, Kemp was particularly impressed by, and devoted much of his writings on, Biddulph to the combination of parts: the ways in which diverse areas of the multifaceted gardens were linked and integrated, and in which a garden and the buildings within it could form a harmonious whole. Here in particular, Kemp is showing an ability to use the hermeneutic circle, moving from the general to the specific and back again, an attractive way of conveying his ideas to his audience.

‘HIS MOST ENDURING MEMORIAL’

Kemp seems to have been a considered and thoughtful author. He produced less than his inspirer Loudon and his mentor Paxton, but he carefully crafted his content for discrete audiences. Specific and practical advice for both professionals and amateurs, and for amateurs appeared in the *Hand-book*; a blend of theory and practice illustrated by examples of his own designs in *How to Lay Out a Garden*; and critiques of designs and practices other than his own in the Biddulph and London works. He does not deal with issues of professional practice as a designer in the books.¹³¹ This careful tailoring of content to audience in different forms of publication has a rather modern feel and is not evident in much gardening literature of the period. How this related to his design practice, and how much it was influenced by his relations with his publishers, are intriguing questions beyond the scope of this article. Kemp was also balanced and generous in his writings and did not attack other designers in a way not uncommon in books of the time.

Despite the popularity of his works, Kemp was certainly not a celebrity figure like Paxton, nor even as well-known personally as other gardening writers of his time. Amherst does not name him in quoting his views on Victoria Park; he is just ‘a writer’ and a ‘capricious critic’. Waugh commented how little was known of his life, even just two decades after his death.¹³² No photograph or life-like image of him exists, and none is known to have been made; again, a contrast with his contemporaries. If, as Waugh says, his books are his memorial, we may suspect he would have wished it that way. In his synergistic linking of research and practice, and his development of an effective and influential style of communication, including some original forms of publication, and making best use of the developing technologies of his time, Kemp appears a, perhaps surprisingly, modern figure. He was, no doubt, fortunate in having Paxton as his mentor, and through him in having particularly forward-looking publishers. But we may well regard Kemp in his own right as a significant figure in the dissemination of nineteenth-century horticultural knowledge, and hence a participant in the development of our information society.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author is grateful to Elizabeth Davey, Robert Lee and Jan Woudstra for generous and wise advice. Access to materials was provided by the libraries of City, University of London, and of University College London, the British Library, the Lindley Library of the Royal Horticultural Society, and the Chatsworth Archives; particular thanks to Tom Pink at the Lindley Library and to Aidan Haley at Chatsworth. Recognition is due also to all the librarians and archivists whose unsung efforts in the digitization of the nineteenth-century record have made so much material more readily accessible.

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⁹⁶ Robert C. Holub, *Reception Theory:*

A Critical Introduction (London: Methuen, 1984); Ika Willis, *Reception* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2017).

⁹⁷ Elliott, *Victorian Gardens*, pp. 102–3.

⁹⁸ Anon., ‘Editorial’, *Gardener’s Chronicle* (25 October 1850), pp. 675–6.

⁹⁹ ‘Notices of books’, *Gardener’s Chronicle* (28 May 1864), p. 511.

¹⁰⁰ M’Intosh, *Book of the Garden*, p. 703.

¹⁰¹ ‘Notes to correspondents: books (a subscriber)’, *The Gardener* (March 1870), p. 144.

¹⁰² We may presume that *How Crops Grow* is the 1869 volume by Arthur H. Church, Samuel W. Johnson, William T. Thiselton-Dyer and William T. Turner, *How Crops Grow: a treatise on the chemical composition, structure and life of the plant* (London: Macmillan, 1869).

¹⁰³ Morris, ‘Diffusion of useful knowledge’.

¹⁰⁴ F. W. Burbidge, ‘Garden libraries’, *Journal of the Royal Horticultural Society*, 20 (1896), pp. 126–8.

¹⁰⁵ Elliott, ‘Garden library at Chiswick’, p. 31.

¹⁰⁶ Mawson, *Art and Craft of Garden Making*.

¹⁰⁷ S. Reynolds Hole, *Our Gardens* (London: Dent, 1901), pp. 75, 301.

¹⁰⁸ Harry Roberts, *English Gardens*. Britain in Pictures Series (London: Collins, 1994).

¹⁰⁹ Geoffrey Taylor, *The Victorian Flower Garden* (London: Skeffington, 1952).

¹¹⁰ Fleming and Gore, *English Garden*, pp. 198, 200–2.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 198. See, for instance, Elliott, *Victorian Gardens*, pp. 102, 112.

¹¹² Fleming and Gore, *English Garden*, p. 198. While this may be something of an exaggeration, it undoubtedly has an element of truth, and makes Kemp’s little-known stature all the more surprising.

¹¹³ Taigel and Williamson, *Know the Landscape*, p. 88.

¹¹⁴ Bisgrove, *National Trust Book of the English Garden*, p. 190.

¹¹⁵ Fleming and Gore, *English Garden*.

¹¹⁶ Stuart, *Garden Triumphant*, pp. 74, 189. This criticism rings oddly, since Kemp’s tone is generally very modest, and noted as such by other commentators

¹¹⁷ Elliott, *Victorian Gardens*.

¹¹⁸ Ethne Clarke, *Hidcote: The Making of a Garden* (London: Michael Joseph, 1989).

¹¹⁹ Elizabeth Banks, *Creating Period Gardens* (Oxford: Phaidon, 1991).

¹²⁰ Roy Strong, *Small Period Gardens* (London: Conran Octopus, 1992).

¹²¹ Brent Elliott, ‘Looking back for the future’, *The Garden*, 123 (September 1998), pp. 670–1.

¹²² John Weale, *London and its Vicinity Exhibited in 1851* (London: John Weale, 1851).

¹²³ David Gilbert, ‘“London in all its glory – or how to enjoy London”: guidebook representations of imperial London’, *Journal of*

Historical Geography, 25/3 (1999), pp. 279–97, at p. 293.

¹²⁴ Edward Kemp, *The Parks, Gardens etc. of London and its Suburbs, described and illustrated for the guidance of strangers* (London: John Weale, 1851).

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 16.

¹²⁶ Alexander McKenzie, *The Parks, Open Spaces and Thoroughfares of London* (London: Waterlow, 1869).

¹²⁷ Alicia Amherst (Mrs Evelyn Cecil), *London Parks and Gardens* (London: Archibald Constable & Co., 1907), p. 137.

¹²⁸ Edward Kemp, 'Garden memoranda', *Gardener's Chronicle* (11 October 1856), p. 679; (18 October 1856), p. 695; (25 October 1856), p. 711; (1 November 1856), pp. 727–8;

(22 November 1856), pp. 775–6; (6 December 1856), pp. 807–8; (24 May 1862), pp. 478–80; (7 June 1862), pp. 527–8; (21 June 1862), pp. 575–6; (19 July 1862), pp. 670–2; (30 August 1862), pp. 807–8.

¹²⁹ Edward Kemp, *Biddulph Grange near Congleton: the residence of James Bateman, Esq.* (London: Bradbury & Evans, 1862).

¹³⁰ Elliott, *Victorian Gardens*, pp. 102–6, 121–2; Hayden, *Biddulph Grange Staffordshire*; Jane Owen, 'Enigma of the wall which zigged but did not zag', *The Times* (2 November 2004), p. 67.

¹³¹ I am indebted to Jan Woudstra for drawing my attention to this point.

¹³² Frank A. Waugh, 'Biographical note', in Kemp, *Landscape Gardening*, pp. xv–xvii.