

Stowe

Stowe, Buckinghamshire, UK

Photographs by Alan Ward 1985, 1999, 2008

Notes on the Making of the Photographs

Stowe is one of the most significant landscape gardens of the eighteenth century, that has fortuitously survived largely intact. The Temple and Cobham families, who built the garden over a fifty-year period beginning around 1715, encountered difficult times in the nineteenth century. They sold the property to a school that reused the house as classrooms and added buildings for their needs, while steering clear of the garden. The school donated the garden to the National Trust in 1989, who began the process of restoring the site, which is ongoing.

The initial phases were built in geometric patterns with grids of trees, allées, and regularly shaped ponds - all within an overall hexagonal pattern, laid out by Charles Bridgeman. He introduced sunken barriers, or ha-ha walls borrowed from military engineering, to allow for unobstructed views to a more expansive landscape (3). Stowe was reworked beginning in the early eighteenth century by the owner Richard Temple - the first Viscount Cobham, as well as designers John Vanbrugh, William Kent and Lancelot Brown. Stowe has multiple layers, first by Viscount Cobham, who elected to remove most of the hexagonal plan by Bridgeman in favor of a more naturally flowing design of spaces and planting. The revisions by these notable designers include a palette of compositions reminiscent of the English countryside with sinuous streams and lakes in valleys, along with woodlands and glades. The original approach to Stowe was along a

road just east of the house in a small valley, constraining the garden. The entry was shifted west in the 1730s to make a grander approach drive crossing serpentine lakes and flanked by two gateway pavilions (5). The existing road and buildings east of the house were removed, except for St. Mary Church from the fourteenth century, leaving this remnant of the medieval village of Stowe (20). Temple and William Kent planned the Elysian Fields on the reclaimed land, retaining the existing sloping topography of the site. Weirs were added to a small stream to create ponds, named the River Styx derived from Greek mythology as a setting for allegorical structures, such as the Temple of Ancient Virtue, Temple of British Worthies and the Grenville Column (15-25).

The most significant character defining features at Stowe are the temples, pavilions and other monuments in the landscape that convey a range of references about the family and its political leanings of the era, as well as English history and other timeless mythological meanings. The photographs are views along an extensive walking trail that attracted visitors to experience the site with its didactic buildings and monuments. Based on the number of guidebooks that interpreted the Stowe landscape garden printed in the eighteenth century; opening the garden to the public - even a selected public, must have been to a significant number of visitors. The guidebooks were needed to explain the complex and somewhat elusive meanings in the Stowe landscape.

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Notes

Selected Publication of the Photographs:

Linden-Ward, Blanche, *Silent City on a Hill: Landscapes of Memory and Boston's Mount Auburn Cemetery*, 1989