# *'The Fidelity of a Mirror'*

## The Late 18th and early 19th Century Landscape at Middleton Hall

University of Wales Trinity Saint David

MA Landscape Management and Environmental Archaeology

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# Contents

## Summary

The intention of this study is to examine evidence for the designed landscape at Middleton Hall, now the site of the National Botanic Garden of Wales, during the late 18th and early 19th centuries. Very little documentary evidence remains of Sir William Paxton's improvements to the estate and there are no plans or letters confirming the involvement of various individuals. However two vital sources of information are still extant. There is a detailed description of a visit to Middleton Hall in 1813 made by the Harcourt Family and an album of watercolours with a plan of the park by Thomas Hornor made in 1815 and still in the possession of Paxton's descendants. The deconstruction of these two primary sources offers a great deal of information about the landscape at Middleton Hall which was evolving at the juncture between two great movements in landscape design.

## Acknowledgements

I am indebted to the authors of the texts I have consulted in order to carry out this dissertation. I hope I have given due acknowledgement throughout.

I am grateful for the support, advice and interesting conversations I have had with my dissertation supervisor Dr Jemma Bezant. I must thank Tom Lloyd who kindly gave his time to talk to me and has shared his images of the estate.

I greatly appreciate the assistance given to me by the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Wales, Carmarthen Record Office, The National Library of Wales, and The National Museum of Wales for access to photographs and documents, pertaining to Middleton Hall and Thomas Hornor's paintings of other estates in South Wales.

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## List of figures



(With kind permission from The National Botanic Garden of Wales, the original paintings are owned by the Grant family). All other images S. Fox.

# Introduction

## 1. The Evidence

This study intends to examine the documentary and visual evidence for the late 18th and early 19th century designed landscape at Middleton Hall using Thomas Hornor's paintings, estate plan and the commentary from the album he made for Middleton Hall, as well as a detailed extract from *The Memoirs of the Harcourt family; a tale for young ladies*, which describes an afternoon's visit and tour of the park.

A comparative analysis of these sources has made it possible to test the veracity or realism of Hornor's images, which in the past has been in some doubt. Was his album intended as a Reptonian 'Red Book' or was it a true picture of what was already in existence in the landscape? Part of the analysis will in addition assess the commonalities between what he saw in the landscape at Middleton Hall and Hornor's pamphlet published in 1814, which was a plea for a practical interpretation of the picturesque as well as a thinly disguised sales pitch for his services as surveyor and landscape gardener.

There has been a considerable amount of academic interest in recent years in Thomas Hornor. Until now however, little has been written regarding his work at Middleton Hall because the album and survey he created for the estate has remained in private hands. The albums he created for a cluster of clients in the Neath Valley and Vale of Glamorgan have drawn the interest of local historians because they are freely accessible in the public domain. However, it his astounding achievements in London, that took place after his Welsh period, which have attracted the most attention, particularly in studies of Panoramarists.

## 2. 'Enchantingly romantic' - The Ornamental Features

The development of Sir William Paxton's Park overlaid earlier agricultural and ornamental phases, smoothing over but not entirely obliterating them. In its turn the landscape created at Middleton Hall by Paxton suffered from many years of damage and neglect until the late 20th century.

The dams of lower lakes have been breached and they are now silted up and overgrown. However in Pont Felin-gât in the north of the park, the waterfall, a cascade and a large stone bridge are still intact as well as some of the engineering works responsible for water management.

The pretty ornamental bridges, bath houses, grotto and a hermit's cave with their ephemeral flower gardens have gone, as has the mansion which burnt down in 1931. However the remains of Paxton's landscape still evokes strong emotions in the modern visitor. Just as 200 years ago the Harcourts found it 'enchantingly romantic' we still do likewise today.

**3. The Estate Owners - 500 Years of Middleton Hall**

The landscape at the Middleton Hall has been reworked over the past 500 years with some striking themes resurfacing periodically: such as water management for ornamental purposes. In addition, some prehistoric features such as trackways remain fossilised in its parkland (Austin. 2013:pers comm). Strip lynchets are preserved on its slopes, whilst on the higher ground, medieval ridge and furrow underlies Jacobean tree planting circles.

It is known that the land at Middleton Hall was owned by the Duchy of Lancaster in the 16th century. In the late 1500s it is thought that Christopher Middleton, Vicar of *Llanarthney* bought this estate for his nephew David Middleton after his father died at sea and by 1635 we see the first reference to Middleton Hall. The Middletons originated from Cheshire and North Wales, being entrepreneurs, fortune hunters, adventurers and originators of the East India Company in the reigns of Elizabeth and James the first, which resonates given that it was Paxton, a self made man also involved with the East India company; who revived the estate two centuries later. The Middletons created water gardens on the estate in the formal style of their own time; the cyclical nature of the place meant that William Paxton also developed a park decorated with water but in the manner of the late 18th century. After several spendthrift generations the last descendant of the Middletons, Francis Edward Gwyn, was forced to sell the estate due to large debts in the late 18th century.

There appears to have been a short interregnum of a decade in the 1780s where a London solicitor named Gawler and a local land agent called Phillip Lloyd had possession of the estate. There was an advertisement in the Hereford Journal, on the 17th February 1786, for the sale of Philip Lloyd of Heol-ddu's freehold estates including Middleton Hall. According to this the land adjoining the demesne of Middleton Hall provided annual rent of 550l.

In 1789 William Paxton, a successful Nabob bought Middleton Hall for an estimated £40,000 (Kuiters unpub:27). He needed an estate on his return from India in order to further his political and business ambitions and so he bought Middleton Hall leaving the name of the estate unchanged. Paxton continued to improve the estate for over 30 years, landscaping the park with the help of numerous individuals and visiting it regularly until his death aged 80 in 1824.

Edward Adam in turn buys the estate and his descendants live there until the early 20th century. After this it was bought by William Nathaniel Jones a local industrialist, before burning down on 31st October 1931. It was then obtained by Carmarthenshire County Council who carved up the parkland into starter farms for young farmers, a practice that continued until the National Botanic Garden of Wales took over a long lease of the land in the 1990s.

## Methodology and Literature Review

This study poses the question: Were there distinct landscaping fashions represented at Middleton Hall and were they realised in the paintings of Thomas Hornor? A literature review was undertaken of library and online resources for secondary source documentation. Local and national archives were visited to inspect primary sources relevant to the study. The archive at the National Botanic Garden of Wales has also been a very useful resource in terms of the progression of recent thinking about the history of the garden.

Some data analysis was undertaken using appropriate geographical information software, alongside a comparative approach to a range of mapping for the site. A detailed examination of the Hornor commentary and images and the Harcourt text was carried out to assess their veracity and the landscape styles they appear to reference.

The literature surrounding the subject of landscape gardening in the latter half of the 18th century and early part of the 19th century is vast, in part because of dramatic changes in garden fashions which took place during that period. From the landscape gardening of the 1760s exemplified by Capability Brown, to the Picturesque of the 1790s which began as a theoretical and political movement nurtured by his detractors and made 'practical' by Humphry Repton who always had his clients desires at heart, to the Gardenesque in the early 19th century which although it was a term coined by John Claudius Loudon in the 1830's we can see evidence for already during the Regency.

As there is no Paxton Estate archive in existence which could have provided evidence for landscape developments at the site, this study will look at key figures associated with the landscape story of the estate, and landscape fashions during the period.

The literature referenced includes material from archives, as well as published and unpublished works and garden history studies. The key texts studied include papers on William Paxton by Willem Kuiters *William Paxton, 1744-1824: Middleton Hall and the Adventures of a Scottish "Nabob" in South Wales* (Unpublished), and Thomas Hornor by Ralph Hyde (1977) *Thomas Hornor: Pictural*

*Land Surveyor* in Imago Mundi and Elis Jenkins (1971) *Thomas Hornor* in the Glamorgan Historian, in particular as well as Hornor's own pamphlet 'A Description of an Improved Method of Delineating Estates, with Sketch of the Progress of Landscape Gardening in England' (1814) and his narrative to the Middleton Hall album (1815), and copies of the watercolours and the plan were sourced from the National Botanic Gardens archives, as well as the extract regarding a visit to Middleton Hall from *The Memoirs of the Harcourt family; a tale for young ladies* (1813) reproduced by Bettina Harden (2000) in *Middleton Hall a Contemporary Tourist's Description* in The Bulletin. (Welsh Historic Gardens Trust).

## Analysis

### 1. The evolution of the landscape

In 1990 a landscape assessment report was commissioned from De Bois Landscape Survey Group by the Welsh Historic Gardens Trust which highlighted three phases at the Middleton Hall Estate. Firstly what was termed the 'agricultural', followed by the old Middleton Hall from the 1600s and then the highly designed Paxton landscape from the late 18th and early 19th centuries.

### 2. The Agricultural Period

Evidence for the agricultural period includes strip lynchets on the hillside behind the walled gardens and on the opposite side of the valley to the South of Waun Las farm. Further remnants of this period are evidenced by the large field boundary trees such as Oak and Beech remaining as single trees which 'seem to have an origin prior to the designed landscape.' There are also large Beech in the hanging wood to the south of Waun Las farm which 'indicate the presence here of a wood of some considerable antiquity' (De Bois, 1990:4).

The De Bois survey mapped two ponds, one of which is marked as a fish pond on Emanuel Bowen's Map of South Wales (1729) and another pond further to the south east on the hill behind the former Middleton hall.

### 3. Old Middleton hall

De Bois notes that the extensive 'complex' of earthworks north and west of Waunlas farm which appears to have been the site of the old Middleton Hall. Further evidence for this is the 1824 sale catalogue for the estate where reference is made to its demotion as a 'home farm' situated 'at a distance from the mansion, within the park ... Seated on a lawn, nearly surrounded by Plantations.'

The second edition OS map shows 'extensive planting of trees' with some large oaks surrounding the site of the old hall which De Bois (1990:4) suggests may have been remnants of formal plantings. There are also large sweet Chestnuts in the hanging wood to the south east of the old hall dating from 1740, together with

large girthed Beech and oak which supports their suggestion that this is another landscaped area from the Old Middleton Hall period.

The estate at Middleton Hall was providing an income in timber and appears well forested in the early 18th century according to a letter by Walter Middleton writing from Middleton Hall to Thomas Mansell Esq of the Briton Ferry Estate regarding the transport of 'colepitt timber'. Walter had 'hired a vessel to carry off what timber I have in ye forest and elsewhere in these parts' (Middleton, 1705).

Other ornamental features include planting circles for trees which have been noted by Professor David Austin over medieval ridge and furrow higher up in the parkland above the site of the old Middleton Hall.

**4. New Middleton Hall**

A significant amount of plantings by William Paxton are still extant in the estate. Tree ring dating (Du Bois, 1990) of Oak and Beech to the south and east of the park to c1770 suggest that Paxton was buying expensive, semi-mature, twenty year old trees when he was planting in the 1790's. This suggests that Paxton was developing the landscape before his mansion was built and he was planting well grown trees to speedily create or embellish the landscape.

**5. 'Showing his skill and taste' The Landscapers**

Paxton had bought the estate in 1789 and by 1793-5 the architect Samuel Pepys Cockerell was already constructing the new Middleton Hall for him. Pepys Cockerell was the older brother of Paxton's business partner Charles Cockerell; they were the great-nephews of the famous diarist.

Pepys Cockerell designed the splendid new mansion in the neo-classical style which was gaining ground at the time. He favoured it because it was a lighter and more elegant than that of the stolid Palladian mansions of the first half of the 18th century.

In addition to the house it is possible that Pepys Cockerell may have had a hand in the design of the park. He was recognised by Humphry Repton as being a perfectly competent garden designer in addition to his architectural talents, (Brown, 1989:5).

It was a foregone conclusion that Paxton would choose Pepys Cockerell over for instance John Nash, who was in the neighbourhood at the time designing a bath house for John Vaughan at Golden Grove. Nash however, thought he was in the running and regarded the Middleton Hall job as stolen from under his nose. However Pepys Cockerell was ideally placed at the centre of a nabob circle that included Paxton. He had recently designed Daylesford for Warren Hastings, the former Governor of Bengal when Paxton was Assay Master at Calcutta. He later went on to redesign Sezincote for his brother Charles on his return from India. An exotic, Mughal inspired house much admired by the Prince Regent who eventually had Nash design him something similar at the Brighton Pavilion.

It has been suggested that Benjamin Henry Latrobe who worked in Pepys Cockerell's office may have been influential in the design of Middleton Hall. He left England for America in 1796 soon after Middleton Hall was built, on the run from debt and grief after the death of his wife. He went on despite this to become America's first public architect, remodelling the White House, (which has more than a passing resemblance to Middleton Hall) among other commissions.

Some of Latrobe's designs for domestic architecture held by the Library of Congress are reminiscent of features at Middleton Hall for example; a garden building that resembles the Paxton family's bath-house and a landscape plan for a house in Richmond, Virginia, which shows a small park with trees around the perimeter and serpentine walks (Latrobe, 1807-1808).

Part of Latrobe's public work in America included projects to promote public health through clean water supplies including the waterworks in Philadelphia. Like Paxton he had a keen interest in the health benefits of clean water. Ironically he later died of yellow fever in New Orleans working on a waterworks system which was intended to reduce the prevalence of this terrible disease.

It is thought likely that Pepys Cockerell was assisted with the landscaping at Middleton Hall by Samuel Lapidge who was formerly Capability Brown's chief assistant and James Grier a Scottish engineer who also acted as Paxton's estate manager.

Samuel Lapidge had been one of Capability Brown's foreman surveyors for nearly two decades until Brown's death in 1783. But he was much more than this,

according to Brown (2011) he was also his clerk and managed his finances. As well as travelling with his employer, he visited current works to see that all was going smoothly and to put Brown's mind at rest. Brown was godfather to Samuel's first child and Lapidge is also mentioned in Brown's will, who asks that he be allowed to complete all of his unfinished works. Lapidge thus inherited the business as well as Brown's post as Surveyor of the royal gardens at Hampton Court.

Unfortunately none of his plans or drawings of the grounds at Middleton Hall have survived. Further study of parks and gardens and their extant plans his name has been associated with, may prove illuminating with reference to Middleton Hall. Kuiters suggests that Lapidge may have been responsible for the plantations of young trees, the flower beds and the double walled gardens at Middleton Hall. However, the only documentary evidence for Lapidge's involvement is that William Paxton mentions him in a letter to his great friend David Williams of Henllys, dated 9th June 1802 from Brighton:

> Who should I meet on the Steyne [sic] the other day but Lapidge who enquired after you and Mrs Williams in the most affectionate manner – he is down here laying out the Lawn before the Pavillion about ¼ acre. – He has done wonders with it and the Prince is so well pleased that he has promised him [?]10 acres in some other place, to give him an opportunity of showing his skill and taste.
>
> (in Williams, 1766-1844)

This suggests more than a passing acquaintance on both of their parts with the elderly surveyor and landscaper. It is not unreasonable to deduce from this that Lapidge had some involvement in the layout of the Park at Middleton Hall and possibly Henllys as well, the latter with its tradition of a 'ladies walk'. However, Samuel Lapidge died in 1806 so it was not likely that he was engaged by Paxton when he was developing the flower gardens and Spa at Pont Felin-gât.

**6. 'Personal amusement and a source of pride' William Paxton**

Willem Kuiters (unpub:28) in his study, *Middleton Hall and the Adventures of a Scottish Nabob in South Wales* asserts that the 500 acre Park was created by Paxton around his 'magnificent' new mansion to create an appropriate setting in which to display his great wealth and taste. The primary function of the estate was to

increase his prestige as a banker. However the income it would provide was negligible when compared with what Paxton was willing to spend on it.

Nonetheless Kuiters (unpub: 28) is also convinced that Middleton Hall meant more to Paxton than a mere investment 'The fact that he laid aside a very considerable part of it to convert into lakes and scenic but virtually unproductive parkland bears convincing testimony to the nature of Paxton's plans'. He notes that Paxton did not rely on the income from his estate as did many aristocratic and old gentry families. At most according to Kuiters (unpub:28) the estate represented a mere 20% of Paxton's net worth. His combined Pembrokeshire properties alone were worth more than Middleton Hall. Paxton's other properties were more speculative in nature and acted as securities for his banking activities 'Middleton Hall was different. Over the years William Paxton would grow much attached to it and the development of the estate became his personal amusement and source of pride' (Kuiters, unpub:28).

Water management played a dominant role in the designed landscape at Middleton Hall. Kuiters (unpub:32) suggests that Paxton's time in India would have made him aware of the vital nature of water in Mughal gardens. However no 'oriental motifs' were employed at Middleton Hall which is surprising in light of Pepys Cockerell's alterations to Sezincote, the house of Paxton's business partner, which revelled in its eastern imagery. Perhaps Paxton was keen to display his wealth but without reference to where it had come from. His sneering detractors amongst the local gentry were all too willing to do this for him during his political campaigns.

On reflection it is not logical to ask why Middleton Hall wasn't more like Sezincote, which was the apotheosis of the oriental style, as no other house in Britain came near it either before or after, unless we include the Prince Regent's Pavilion at Brighton which it heavily influenced. In addition, Pepys Cockerell's alterations to Sezincote took place over a decade later and were for a very different personality, his brother Charles who confidently rose through the ranks of society on his return from India and was not ashamed to identify through his house and garden where his money had come from.

Paxton may have been influenced by Indian gardens but translated this successfully to the Welsh landscape. As Kuiters (unpub:32) notes, water is plentiful in the Welsh climate which allows for large bodies of water; the shallow rills and basins of water that cool the air in eastern gardens are not needed in Wales.

It is perhaps significant when looking at the landscape of Middleton Hall to remember that Aberglasney in the Towy Valley, not five miles away, produced John Dyer a poet writing in the 1720s, who prefigured the Picturesque and the Romantic poets with his painterly terms and non moralistic descriptions that accepted and admired natural landscape (Jacques, 1983:30).

It is more than likely that Paxton was aware of the controversies surrounding landscape design in the 1790s. The first blows were struck by Richard Knight and Uvedale Price, (both known to Pepys Cockerell) in 1794 and 1796 respectively with their writings on what constitutes the picturesque, just at the period when Paxton and his talented employees were first developing the estate. Kuiters (unpub:32) remarks that 'Paxton though showing a lively interest in landscaping, never slavishly followed the creeds of the day and was happy to ignore their conventions in order to suit his comfort or his own personal sense of beauty.'

Paxton was interested in gardening long before he bought Middleton Hall. He owned two Garden Houses in Serampore and Deetally north of Calcutta in the 1780s. Garden houses were located outside 'the heat, filth and plagues of the city' according to Herbert (2011:65), next to the cooling breezes of the river Hooghly. Europeans used them as weekend retreats, often installing their Indian mistresses or 'Bibis' in them.

These gardens were richly cultivated, their owners imported seed from across the world to see what would flourish in the Bengal climate. Unsurprisingly, one of the many commodities that Paxton dealt in was seeds (Kuiters, unpub:32).

One visitor to Garden Reach in 1780 which boasted many garden houses, described them as 'elegant mansions, surrounded with groves and lawns which descend to the water's edge, and present a constant succession of whatever can delight the eye, or bespeak wealth and elegance in the owners' (Herbert, 2011:65). Phebe Gibbes in her novel *Hartly House* (1789) which portrays the Anglo-Indian encounter also describes the garden of one of these 'bungilos' 'Imagine therefore

to yourself a spot adorned with all the choicest flowers ....encircling the fairest parterre your eyes ever beheld ... every footstep appearing fairy ground and every breeze perfume.'

Here is a description of Warren Hastings the Governor-General and keen gardener at his country retreat just upriver from Garden Reach who 'was never happier than when pottering about his garden in shabby clothes, experimenting with 'curious and valuable exotics from all quarters.' At the same time, he also had honeysuckle and sweetbriar seeds sent out from England (Herbert, 2011:65-66).

Technical innovations delighted Paxton, especially in the area of his particular interest; water management. With the help of Grier he built dams, bridges and sluices, waterfalls and a cascade which all formed part of the complicated arrangement of water features liberally bestowed upon the estate. Cascades were a popular feature in 18th century gardens and had a practical purpose in that they hid the dam holding the water back and could manipulate the flow of water for effect. Their noise also heightened the drama of the scene to the viewer as they approached. Bridges likewise apart from their practical use acted as viewing points and punctuated 'views from elsewhere within the landscape' (Rutherford & Lovie, 2012:29).

Not content with the control of water for ornamental use, running water was piped according to local myth, underneath one of the lakes and up into the house to provide running water for taps and WC's when such a thing even in the grandest of houses was almost unheard of. It also appears from excavations undertaken in the walled garden in 2001 that a system of clay pipes was unearthed which would have heated a hothouse either via heated water or air. Kuiters (unpub:33) has speculated that this hothouse may have been used to grow exotics other than oranges, melons and grapevines, familiar to Paxton from his period in the sub continent.

During the 18th century, baths and spas became extremely fashionable. Led by the Royal Family, Bath and Brighton became popular places where water treatments were thought beneficial to health; ultimately they also became centres of society. William Paxton took his family to both resorts, writing to his friend David

Williams about the good it did his children, bringing the colour back to their cheeks. Paxton had 'great confidence in the medicinal powers of water' (Kuiters, unpub:33).

Naturally when a chalybeate spring was found in 1809 at Pont Felin-gât within the park at Middleton Hall, Paxton lost no time in having a bath-house with dressing rooms and a furnace for hot water built. The whole was surrounded by a pretty flower garden alongside the lower lake where the water was channelled into a small river again before leaving the park.

The bath-house was thatched, with lime washed walls like the late 18th century bath-house at Greenway, Devon which created 'a picturesque incident in the grounds' (Rutherford & Lovie, 2012:119). The spring itself at Pont Felin-gât was enclosed ornamentally by stone-walled steps down into it, with a ledge for placing a drinking container. In Hornor's plan the Pont Felin-gât area is marked as 'chalybeate spring, bath' and there are three tantalising dark blocks which may represent small buildings (see Appendix 1). The section of the same area from the 1824 sale Catalogue map is indistinct. There is more detail in the 1848 tithe map showing paths and plantations intact, if not the flower garden and its associated buildings and the Ordnance Survey map from the 1880s shows a similar picture. It was during the 20th century that the area lost most of its decorative elements (Appendix 1).

At Gayhurst in Buckinghamshire the chalybeate spring waters in a remote part of the pleasure ground were used to bathe the eyes (Rutherford & Lovie, 2012:116). There were three holy wells in the parish of Llanarthne, which had a strong tradition of healing springs, one of which was used to treat spasms.

An earlier bath-house with a plunge bath was constructed near the mansion 'secluded by a grove' (Kuiters unpub:34) for the use of the family. The footings for this are still visible in woodland to the left of the footpath on the way down to Waunlas.

Bath-houses are just one of many Georgian garden buildings that were carefully placed in the landscape earlier in the 18th century, with their design making allusions to the classical or literary, showing not just the wealth and taste of the owner but also their education, but by the early 19th century they were merely pleasing incidents in the landscape. The smaller buildings in a park formed part of

the designed landscape. They were to be viewed from the landscape, and they also acted as shelters from which to view the garden (Rutherford & Lovie, 2012:5).

The mansion built by Pepys Cockerell for Paxton must have been 'an impressive landmark in the middle of the gentle slopes of the surrounding hills and the romantic tinge of the picturesque park' (Kuiters unpub:34/5). The many walks and drives provided a range of opportunities to admire the house in its archetypal 18th century landscape setting of a house framed by trees, with a lawn gently sloping down to water 'by the end of the century all residences of any consequence were surrounded by a landscape park, and appeared to stand in an open sea of grass' (Williamson, 1995:85).

Kuiters suggests that Samuel Lapidge carefully positioned plantations of trees between the mansion and it's out offices. He also states that Lapidge had created a flower garden within an oval gravelled walk at the front of the house. In fact according to Hornor's plan a gravelled walk passes through a grove of trees at the front or southern side of the house that could have contained a flower garden. Later 19th century engravings of the house when it was owned by the Adam/Abadam family shows this aspect of the house as having a formal garden with the oval divided into four segments and a fountain at the centre.

**7. The Sale Catalogue**

Sir William Paxton died in 1824 and the Sale Catalogue for Middleton Hall that same year describes a 'handsome conservatory' 36 feet long with 'fine productive vines' (1824:5), as well as a 'flower garden round and lawn in front with dry gravelled walks and folding gates at the entrance' (1824:6). The walled garden's three acres are approached through a plantation and an orchard which contained 'choice well selected fruit trees, stocked, cropped and planted.' There was a hot house here, a peach house and a grape house, as well as a gardener's house with a shed. In addition there was a melon ground with pine pits and an ice house.

The catalogue goes on to describe the walks which branch off from the house through park, woods and plantations, 'some of which lead to a beautiful lake of fine clear water, of considerable extent serving aquatic purposes' which suggests that it was stocked with fish. There are several 'umbrageous walks, presenting fresh

views' alongside the lake which lead via a wooden bridge to 'an enchanting dell with a flower garden' containing a 'rustic building with a chalybeate and vapour bath, with dressing rooms' as well as a 'grotto and a chalybeate spring, which has pipes conducting the overflow to the outside of the Park.' Leading on from here are the:

> pleasure grounds ...laid out with exquisite taste, with delightfully shady diversified walks, (richly ornamented by nature and improved by Art) by the lake and streams of water with a majestic waterfall enlivened by flower gardens and the interesting scenery that alternately presents itself to the eye (Sale Catalogue, 1824:6).

Near the mansion is 'another ornamental building or bath-house by the side of the lake secluded by a grove' the interior is adapted as a 'plunging bath, and also a hot bath with a furnace room and a dressing room.'

The Park 'abounds with a variety of other walks and drives, presenting a fresh and varied scenery at almost every point, around it is the beautiful vale through which the Towey winds in grandeur'. Reference is also made to the historic landscape outside the park, to Dinefwr and Dryslwyn Castle, as well as Grongar Hill. It also mentions a 'Gothic Tower' on the summit of a hill to the north of the park, 'adorned by fine thriving plantations' accessed by various drives described as 'a grand ornament and landmark in the county'(Sale Catalogue, 1824:6).

**8. Paxton's Landscape Phases**

It appears that there were two phases of landscaping at Middleton Hall during Paxton's ownership, the initial phase was coterminous with the building of the new mansion or took place soon after; which included the creation of the 'necklace of lakes' and 'flourishing plantations'.

The second phase included the development of Pont Felin-gât at the northernmost end of the Park after a mineral spring had been discovered there. Paxton had this water analysed and it was found to be iron rich and not dissimilar in its chemical make up to the waters at Tunbridge Wells.

Paxton with his lifelong interest in the health giving effects of water was had a bath-house erected with a pretty Reptonian flower garden near the spring with a

view to creating a mini-spa. It was certainly promoted locally and visits by nearby gentry and civic figures to the spot were reported in the press. It has been suggested by Tom Lloyd (pers comm) that the Emlyn Arms in Llanarthne with its strangely shaped roof, was built or altered to offer further treatment or accommodate parties visiting the spa. Contemporary sources also mention a house built for the accommodation of spa goers erected outside the park wall but no trace of this remains near to Pont Felin-gât. The closest building still in existence is Middleton Lodge.

**9. Travellers Tales**

There are conflicting reports regarding the park in the late 18th and early 19th centuries. It was described by Skrine (1798:600) as 'narrow and ill-planted'. In contrast Iolo Morganwg (1804:154) the well known antiquarian, bard and forger writes in his diary in 1804 after visiting Middleton Hall, of the 'numerous flourishing plantations ... rising up about it, in a beautiful country'. It is important to note that he took a great deal of interest in Welsh agriculture, and in particular the planting of trees, not forgetting aesthetic considerations. Here he is describing plantings on nearby Grongar Hill, part of the Aberglasney estate where there was a:

> formal clump of pine of about 20 or 30 years growth [which] disgraces Grongar, [and] appears like a disgusting scab on it, if its Proprietor possessed a grain of taste he would soon consign it to the flames.
>
> (Morganwg 1804:154)

Deciduous trees such as oaks were part of the political iconography of an estate and signified social stability and the pedigree of their owners, whereas conifers in the landscape were seen much as 'garish modern villas, signs of the disruptive modern influence of the new, often industrially rich' (Cosgrove and Daniels, 1988:52). At Dinefwr Park Iolo Morganwg (1804) notes 'the Noble woods' and describes Golden Grove the neighbouring estate to Middleton Hall as:

> a fine old mansion, [with] a great number of very large Oaks in the Park and Pleasure grounds, a great many of them girt from 14 to 16 feet....surrounded by hills, dales and woods of considerable beauty.
>
> (Morganwg, 1804:155)

Skrine's view of Middleton Hall was already outmoded in 1798, when the mores of the picturesque landscape were already in common currency. The 'narrow and ill planted park' was probably only four or five years old at the most. He also disapproved of the position of the park, high above the Towy valley, which meant that its pastoral and domestic countryside so beloved of the Brownian improvers could not be enjoyed and therefore it was the 'wild and distant hills' in the background which caught the eye and spoilt the prospect even further.

Despite all this, Skrine's negative scrutiny is important as it is the earliest description of Middleton Hall that has so far come to light. His critical view of Middleton Hall which follows here in full was copied by two further topographical authors Nicholson (1840) and England (1822) respectively who paraphrased and perpetuated his prejudices. His sarcastic comments are suggestive of Nabob snobbery which was rife at the time. As Fellinger (2010:14) points out, Nabobs were seen as 'ungenteelly rich'. Their return to Britain 'violated class hierarchies'; they exploited India and were corrupted by it in turn.

Skrine said that Middleton Hall 'equals the proudest of Cambrian Mansions in Asiatic pomp and splendour.' This is shorthand, what he is really saying that this is a house built on suspect money, by a man who has no 'family' and has come from nowhere, he is a Nabob. Middleton Hall despite its riches will never be as good as the old Welsh houses built by the local aristocracy and gentry:

> Middleton hall, the splendid modern feat of Mr. Paxton, which far eclipses the proudest of the Cambrian mansions in Asiatic pomp and splendour. This house may be justly admired for the exterior beauty of its figure, as well as for its internal elegance and decoration; yet does a vast pile of Portland stone, curiously chisseled, and finished in the highest style of the Grecian taste, appear to me somewhat in consonant with the more imposing, though simple majesty, of the surrounding country. Neither did its situation please me, confined by a narrow and ill-planted park, and perched on the summit of one of the great boundaries of the Vale of Towey, too high to command its beauties; where the eye, overlooking the course of the river, encountered only those wild and distant hills which divide the counties of Caermarthen

> and Cardigan. We returned from Middleton hall with pleasure, to resume our progress in the charming vale below.
>
> (Skrine, 1798:600)

In contrast Richard Fenton the Welsh topographer and poet, was hospitably received by Paxton and was taken by his sons to see Llyn Llech Owain. On their return from the direction of the Tower, he notes the 'Birds Eye view of the house and grounds' a view which was later put to good effect by Thomas Hornor's brush in 1815. Fenton genuinely appears to admire Middleton Hall:

> Which has the most truly parkish and elegant appearance of any place in the Country. In the Evening walked nearly round the Grounds, pursuing the course of the Drive, and the more I see the more I admire the place and the manner in which it has been laid out.
>
> (Fenton, 1804-13:57)

Many 19th century descriptions of the estate in the main admire its beauty, but are florid paeans of praise and tantalisingly short on detail. In 1833 nine years after the death of Paxton the parkland is still being eulogised for its range of features and layout:

> The splendid demesne of Middleton Hall, the numerous beauties of which contribute greatly to adorn the scenery and are viewed in harmonious design from this place.
>
> (Lewis, 1833)

Later descriptions are less flattering perhaps as fashions have changed. Nicholson's description of Sir William as 'Mr Paxton' puts him clearly in his place as a parvenu, the innocuous phrase 'banker at Bengal' would have been understood at the time to suggest that he was corrupt, grasping and upstart:

> Middleton Hall is unoccupied and situated s. of the valley towards Carmarthen, but commands none of its beauties. This mansion was built a few years since by Mr Paxton, formerly a banker at Bengal, and has been pronounced one of the most splendid specimens of modern architecture in Wales, but being unfavourably situated it is much neglected.
>
> (Nicholson, 1840:341)

By 1870 Middleton hall barely rates a mention in Sargent's 'Skeleton Tours' in contrast, he praises the gardens of nearby Golden grove and Dinefwr with their

‘exquisitely kept grounds’ and ‘lovely flower garden’ but Middleton’s star had waned, it was no longer a must see on the traveller’s itinerary.

**10. Plantations and Pathways**

There is documentary evidence in maps and paintings that Paxton’s park was unfenced internally and was probably grazed by cattle and sheep, there being little indication of deer management (Du Bois 1990:6). However there is a sketch dating from the 1830’s which clearly shows deer in the park near the mansion, (see fig. 1).

Planting trees in small clumps throughout the open parkland may have been a two handed policy according to Du Bois (1990:6), to maximise grazing area and make the trees easier to protect.

The Northern end of the park is still surrounded by a wall which protected the parkland’s plantations, at least from the depredations of the tenants’ livestock to the north. It is not clear if a wall fully encircled the 500-acre park, but the old boundary of the Park still remains today as an embanked hedge in its southern end.

Du bois noted that the focus of Paxton’s ‘Pleasure Grounds’ still exist as the ‘extensive remains’ of the lakes, paths, cascades and pleasure grounds laid out by Paxton, and in addition the ‘complex’ of paths and drives delineated in the sales particulars of 1824 and the tithe map of 1847-8. Nonetheless, the most important features in the park are Paxton’s chain of lakes ‘which encircled his mansion’ (Du Bois, 1990:6) which lay in the sometimes steep sided river valleys crossing the park.

The series of pathways through these valleys running alongside the valleys helped ‘to exaggerate their scale’ (Du Bois, 1990:6), and to lead visitors on foot to the ‘viewing points’ from which to admire these carefully constructed features. The same could be said of the carriage drives. Some of these paths have been reinstated in the Pont Felin-gât woodland since 1990 and may not follow the original routes, but a substantial proportion them are still hidden in the undergrowth which surrounds the marshy ground which was once Pond Du.


Figure 1 - Image of Middleton Hall dated 1833, eight years after Paxton's death clearly showing deer in the park

The remains of a network of paths across the Parkland which were designed to wind 'around clumps of trees' still exist; a Brownian 'hide and reveal' technique which satisfied the desire for variety (Du Bois, 1990:6). By 1990 only a few of these clumps remained and were sadly reduced allusions to their former role.

The raised position of the mansion visible from most of the park suggests that, 'variety was achieved in the interplay of trees in the fore and middle ground' rather than the 'construction of elaborate' viewpoints, but some viewing points directed at the mansion were observed (Du Bois, 1990:7).

Evidence of landscaping post Paxton's death in 1824 were noted by Dubois, there was a dead Lebanese Cedar to the west of Pond Du, remnants of lines of conifers as well as a line of Elms along a drive to the east of the mansion which may have been added by Edward Adams or his son Edward Abadam. It has been stated that the Abadams family planted many more conifers in the park, a genus which increased in fashion during the 19th century.

Dubois concluded that Paxton's mansion was the focus of the designed landscape surrounding it, it's destruction by fire in the 1930's has made the Parkland lose its cohesive purpose. However it was felt that the evidence regarding Paxton's time which still exists in maps and paintings as well as on the ground only needs sufficient funding to be re-awakened.

The main recommendation by the Dubois report was that the parkland trees be replanted, citing the OS second edition 25"map as a good guide to the positions of the trees and the numbers that were once there. The range of species included Oak, Beech Lime, Hornbeam and Ash. Recreating new plantations across the park guided by the appropriate use of maps and paintings could according to Du Bois dramatically assist in the re-creation of a coherent parkland whose primary role in Paxton's time was ornamental rather than agricultural.

**11. 'Pictural Delineator' Thomas Hornor**

On the 20th of September 1814, Thomas Hornor wrote to Sir William Paxton of Middleton Hall, Carmarthenshire to explain that he had been delayed with a commission at Lord Jersey's estate in Briton ferry but would be taking up his 'kind invitation' to come to Middleton Hall when convenient to Sir William.

Hornor had placed advertisements in the Cambrian newspaper on 2nd and the 16th April 1814, styling himself as a 'Pictural Delineator of Estates' who having been asked to undertake some surveying work in Wales over the summer was happy to receive additional commissions to which would reduce the travel costs 'chargeable' to additional properties.

Amongst the landowners who probably commissioned Hornor in reponse to this, were Lord Jersey at Vernon House, Charles Tennant in Cadoxton, John Llewellyn at Ynysygerwn, John Edwards at Rheola and William Williams at Aberpergwm.

In total, Elis Jenkins in his study of Hornor (1971:39) has calculated that Hornor made at least 300-400 watercolour drawings in Glamorgan, which was then largely unspoilt by industry. The Neath estuary had already attracted John Warwick Smith and Turner amongst other artists and 'if Hornor lacked their concentrated vision, there were compensations in his resourcefulness and a fine feeling for the spaciousness of wood and water'. Jenkins (1971:44) also felt that Hornor's narratives for the watercolours with their 'immaculate copperplate', are occasionally clichéd or sentimental but they are also spirited and imaginative. They are not written with 'cloying sweetness' (Mowl, 2000:178) like the prose in Repton's Red Books.

Jenkins (1971:41) notes the sheer effort involved in the production of these albums over a period of five years 'each one virtually a large illuminated manuscript'. In addition to this 'the descriptive pages and the exquisite paintings of scenery are all in Hornor's own hand'. It is likely that he had someone to bind and make the carcass of the albums but the rest was all his own work.

Jenkins (1971:44) suggests that Hornor's mode of working was probably the same as most travelling artists. That he would sketch on site and finish the watercolours back in London, which would explain his 'occasional topographical absurdities'. Despite these visual anomalies, nearly all his 'drawings are pleasing to look at'.

Hornor may have borrowed the terms 'Pictural' and 'picturalized' from the vocabulary of contemporary landscape gardeners. Ralph Hyde (1977) notes that,

William Marshall, a landscape gardener who also wrote three books about the craft, used the term, 'Picturable Eyeful'.

Hornor describes in his advertisements what form his ‘delineation’ method takes:

> It combines the advantages of a Common Map with those of a landscape, representing the estate itself but also the adjoining country in a panoramic perspective.
>
> (Cambrian, 1814)

Hornor’s album for Middleton Hall was completed in 1815, when Sir William Paxton’s improvements to the estate were complete and the plantations were maturing. 1815 also marked the end of the wars between Britain and France and was also was the year after Austen’s *Mansfield Park* was published which cleverly satirised the fashion for landowners to make over their estates in the picturesque style.

Ralph Hyde (1977:23) in his paper *Thomas Hornor: Pictural Land Surveyor* describes Thomas Hornor as forgotten ‘but in his day he was a sensation’. In the 1820s his many ‘extraordinary exploits’ made him notorious. He was a:

> Land surveyor, landscape gardener, accomplished artist, highly ingenious inventor, visionary, above all, showman, he combined all these skills and gifts and attracted the attention of the media as no other land surveyor ever has.
>
> (Hyde, 1977:23)

He was hailed as a genius until he ran away to America to escape his debts totalling £60,000 and he was characterised by one commentator as a 'compound of Barnum and Nash - as great a dandy as the one, and as great a humbug as the other' (Hyde, 1977:23).

Thomas Hornor was born in Hull in 1785. His father was a grocer and a Quaker. The young Thomas was already active in Manchester early 1800s surveying the property of the free grammar school. By 1807 he was living in Kentish town when he submitted a successful bid to survey the parish of Clerkenwell. Hyde (1976:1) found that in compiling a list 260 of London’s maps ‘Hornor’s Clerkenwell survey ‘is one of the most remarkable that I have seen’.

He caught the eye of one of the vestry clerks, a wealthy solicitor named William Cook who patronised him and set him up in a successful business carrying out surveys and valuations of landed properties from the division of commons to levelling land for canals as well as apparently surveying several Scottish estates between 1 and 3000 acres (Hyde, 1977:24).

Hornor developed a new method of producing plans for estates which he called 'panoramic chorometry'. To advertise this he had small examples of this work printed which blended 'the Picture with the Plan'. Hyde notes that these plans are impressively detailed and give 'an impression of fastidious accuracy' (Hyde, 1977:24), but in the case of the new version of the 1813 Clerkenwell survey it is 'now a decidedly strange map. Over a large area of the parish a cloud casts a shadow,' and 'the compass direction consists of an avenging angel swooping through the cloud with a spear' (Hyde, 1977:24).

**12. The Hornor Manifesto**

Thomas Hornor responding to the fashion for Picturesque landscaping, naturally had his own opinions on the subject and in 1813 published them in a pamphlet entitled *Description of an Improved Method of Delineating Estates, with Sketch of the Progress of Landscape Gardening in England.*

This booklet purports to be an 'apologia' (Hyde 1976:6) for the picturesque but it acts in the main as an advertisement for the package of survey and landscaping he could offer to estate owners. Jenkins (1971:46) describes it as a 'little masterpiece... that has inexplicably fallen through the Eng Lit. net that caught *The Compleat Angler.* The booklet is 'full of erudition, wit and that rarest of gifts a sensitive feeling for words, a masterly history of landscape-gardening'.

Hornor sets out his argument in favour of maps with the qualities of pictures. He maintains that art and map making have diverged to the detriment of the latter:

> The art of land surveying has remained stationary for a long period. The arts of surveying and landscape painting, which seem to have been united in former days, are now distinct.
>
> (Hornor, 1813:7)

Hornor asserts that he can draw a precise plan that will also be an interesting picture of an estate, where the landscape is shown in its 'natural colours' as if taken from a high point above the property using a camera obscura.

He claimed 'to have devised a contraption that could combine accuracy with beauty....not a map but a pictorial representation' (Jenkins, 1971:38). He doesn't reveal the exact nature of his instrument but in the Prospect of the Vale of Neath from the summit of Bow Main (Bwa Maen) he shows himself projecting an image onto a sheet with a telescopic type device, to the astonishment of a young lady.

Hornor lists some of the uses his estate plans could be put to: they could be purely decorative, or they could be useful when selling estates acting as a kind of elaborate brochure which could be perused by potential purchasers before visiting the property.

Hornor prides himself on the 'accuracy' of his technique, almost as if he is refuting any potential detractors:

> 'The primary requisite in all plans of estates is accuracy and in making this improvement, I have ever paid a scrupulous regard to it ... if my pictural delineations ...were deficient in that requisite, they ought not to stand in competition with the naked and unadorned performances executed in the old style.'
>
> (Hornor, 1813:6)

Hornor (1813:7) laments that the 'The arts of Surveying and of Landscape painting, which seem to have been united in former ages, are now distinct'. He states that it is possible to achieve 'mathematical precision' with the 'fidelity of a mirror' (1813:10) as well as an 'interesting picture' from his methods (1813:8).

Hornor (1813:10) goes on to say that maps and plans are all very well when properties are being sold but do not match up to the descriptions of the property for sale. It is really the old adage he is trying to express here, that a picture speaks a thousand words. The following could almost be a description of Middleton Hall 'The tall full-grown woods, the sweeping lawns, the noble expanse of water, the rich variety of arable and pasture, the wide range of prospect'.

Figure 2 - Detail from Prospect of the Vale of Neath from the summit of Bow Main (Bwa Maen) by Thomas Hornor. (Neath Antiquarian Society).

Hornor compares his landscape drawings to ‘a picture of a loved one’. It is certainly true that many estate owners including Sir William Paxton genuinely did love their rural retreats, which often represented the fruit of all their labours.

His estate maps give prominence to the areas actually owned by it, obscuring ‘interjacent tracts’ that may abut it without ‘destroying the harmony of the picture’ (Hornor, 1813:14). This was an important consideration as many landowners sought to round off their parks and lands by purchase or exchange of lands, something Paxton certainly did at Middleton Hall, sometimes however this was not always possible and unsightly incursions of neighbouring land might negatively affect a fair prospect.

Hornor (1813:14) claims to be able to show tiny features such as cottages, waterfalls, and a tower, in detail but also in proportion to the picture as a whole. Large-scale paintings with finely observed detail have fascinated throughout the history of art. He was probably well aware that his images pandered to this interest.

Yet another use he suggests for his ‘pictural’ surveys is that they will enable the landowner to best see where improvements or changes might be made to the landscape, for example ‘opening roads, erecting buildings’ in the way that an ordinary map cannot. Another consideration was the saving of ‘expence’ ‘particularly in planting’ his surveys would show where the most effective plantings could be made (Hornor, 1813:14).

To the argument that ‘Pictorial ornament was out of place in a surveyor’s plan’, Hornor (1813:20) explains that he attempts to add ‘interest and beauty’ to a plan ‘which accords with the modern taste for landscape gardening’. This may be an allusion to Humphry Repton’s Red Books which used before and after views to convince owners to undertake landscape works rather than the more cartographic, one dimensional plans of an earlier generation of improvers such as Lancelot Brown.

Here Hornor is nudging the debate towards the realms of the picturesque, ‘nature’ should not be ‘blamed’ for beautifying the landscape and is always waiting for an opportunity to soften and give variety to the man made agricultural landscape. He poses another rhetorical question; are his plans too picturesque? He

answers this with ‘then nature is at fault for they are painted after nature’ (Hornor, 1813:27).

Hornor (1813:20) next reverts back to his sales pitch to explain that the albums he produces can be taken by the landowner to ‘town’ or even abroad in the winter where they can ‘preserve the idea of his rural retirement vivid and correct’. For the landed proprietor who loves his rural estate they ‘preserve the most cherished affections’ (Hornor, 1813:29).

The obligations of the social and political season that require the estate owning classes to spend half of the year in town, can be ameliorated by the purchase of his services to commodify their estate, it is the perfect luxury item for the landed proprietor who has everything.

Hornor (1813:31) now moves on to the subject of landscape gardening proper. He is aware that ‘In touching upon the subject of Landscape Gardening ... that I shall excite a multitude of perplexing feelings in the breasts of many landed proprietors.’ He then goes on to talk about the landscaping controversy provoked in the 1780s and 1790s by Gilpin, Knight and Price which is ‘not yet decided’. How is the lay person to interpret the theories at this tipping point of garden fashion? He refers to the ‘unfathomable sea’ of literature of all sorts upon the subject and the on the quandary of landowners over which side to come down upon. No-one wants to be seen to ‘violate the principles of good taste in rural ornament’. This is where he positions himself as the knowledgeable guide assisting landowners through the pitfalls of landscape improvement (Hornor, 1813:20).

Hornor (1813:37) does not blame ‘the celebrated’ Capability Brown who merely ‘copied nature’ as his many detractors did after his death. He goes on to say ‘if Brown copied nature, why did not the fashion endure?’ concluding that the fault lies with Brown’s ‘ignorant followers’ who debased it by pursuing:

> The excess of the fashion, and thus rendered the fashion itself liable to ridicule ...
>
> (Hornor, 1813:37)

Hornor (1813:38) identifies 1794 when Richard Payne Knight, published *An Analytical Inquiry into the Principles of Taste* as the year the controversy

began ‘for the dominion of this art that entirely bewildered its cultivators. That period was the era of the picturesque.’

Hornor (1813:39-40) is very taken with the values of the picturesque movement ‘every place and every scene worth observing must have something of the sublime, the beautiful or the picturesque’. He admires ‘variety and intricacy’ in the landscape and feels that it is the landscape gardener’s role to ‘heighten’ the ‘roughness which constitutes the Picturesque’.

Hornor (1813:31) feels that ‘Brown and his followers’ applied their rules too rigidly ‘a clump, a belt and a piece of water there must be.’ This stereotypical view of what is proper in the ornamental landscape still prevails:

> the *owner* has an undoubted right to do as he shall please; men in general consider wood and water as essential parts of rural ornament’ they will plant more trees and dam a ‘scanty brook’ so as to form a marked feature in the prospect.
>
> (Hornor, 1813:42)

On the other hand Hornor (1813:44) found it ‘preposterous’ that landowners when laying out their grounds should plant trees and build ruins so that in time their land might imitate a painting by Claude ‘So far inconsistent is the notion of composing a landscape painting, with that of composing a landscape.’ The Picturesque formula must not be adopted wholesale but landowners ‘may suffer certain places to remain as nature left them. Here and there a rough spot may be endured’.

By the 1809 with the publication of William Combe’s satirical poem *The Tour of Doctor Syntax in search of the Picturesque* the backlash against the movement had well and truly begun. It set the precedent which enabled Hornor to question the most ludicrous precepts of the picturesque.

The days of a ‘lawn’ running up to the walls of the house were numbered when Hornor was writing this, but ‘near the house picturesque beauty must be sacrificed to neatness; but to what extent will ever be a matter of dispute among improvers’ (Hornor, 1813:46). He makes the pragmatic mental leap, recognising that much picturesque theory is by definition a fantasy and that ‘elegance’ is more

in keeping with the grounds immediately surrounding a house. It would be ridiculous to introduce 'rough' ground to this area which is domestic and therefore 'real' 'there can be no such thing as artificial picturesque in real landscape' (Hornor, 1813:47).

The real problem with a manufactured picturesque landscape is its lack of authenticity which Hornor highlights here:

> though we allow that a broken rock, down the sides of which pours a cascade in rude and irregular manner is strongly imbued with this character; yet no sooner are we told that the waters are supplied by pipes to a cistern on the summit than we feel vexed at the illusion and no longer dignify the scene with the epithet of picturesque
>
> (Hornor, 1813:48)

He chose to remain silent on the artificial nature of water management at Middleton Hall two years later. However (1813:48) he would have been pleased to see that the picturesque aspect of the estate remained on its periphery 'The picturesque character which an estate may possess may still be preserved in its proper region; that is at a distance from the mansion; the sequestered dingle, with here and there a venerable cottage, inhabited by peasants but the surrounds of the house should be as neatly dressed as its inhabitants.'

Gentlemen who wish to improve their estates in the picturesque manner do not have to be connoisseurs of French and Italian art but could follow Hornor's (1813:50) advice and soften the banks of their serpentine in order to make it appear more like a natural river. They should plant trees in groups rather than clumps and in laying out walks avoid geometrical patterns. Improvers should 'adorn and embellish' with an eye to what is already there in the landscape (Hornor, 1813:31).

Hornor (1813:51) recommends the 'moderate' introduction of 'foreign trees' which will give informality to the scene and break up 'large unwieldy masses of woods'. Regarding 'lawning' Hornor feels that 'the excess of it only is reprehensible' and that it is:

> one of the most delightful features of a pleasure-ground. A certain expanse of verdant surface , especially if there be gentle undulations, is grateful to the

> eye, it tempts us to ramble over it, and if there be groups not clumps of umbrageous trees interspersed up on it there can be no scene more agreeable.'
>
> (Hornor, 1813:52)

Hornor (1813:53) declares that the adherents of the picturesque have fallen into the same traps of which they have accused others 'narrowed as they are by gazing at composition'. He also criticises the 'meandering of their prose' which does not offer practical advice but leaves prospective improvers in the dark about what exactly constitutes the picturesque and how to achieve it.

Parkland has been characterised in the latter half of the 20th century as the 'landscape of exclusion' and Dana Arnold has commented that:

> As a site in which to express the cultural concerns of the nation, the English landscape garden was to remain a contested social and aesthetic space throughout the 18th century, but a space also powerfully homogenising in its creation of a shared identity within which those differences could be articulated.
>
> (Arnold, 1998:78)

Was the evolution of the landscape garden the microcosm where the democratising forces of British politics and social life were played out; in fact where ultimately the park became public?

Hornor reminds us that a landscape garden must have some form of cultivation to make it enjoyable to walk in 'to walk along the banks of a stream judiciously adorned and shaded at intervals by trees, forms such an agreeable recreation. A garden is not just for looking at, but also for being in' (Hornor, 1813:53). Girouard (1978:210) remarks that 'Walking round a garden or driving round a park, whether one's own or somebody elses, loomed large in the ample leisure time of people in polite society.'

An estate can be ornamented 'requisite in the demesne of a gentleman' whilst preserving its character 'no wanton changes should be made' (Hornor, 1813:31). Hornor (1813:55) conceded that minor embellishments such as a hermitage may be allowed and rustic chairs in a rural estate are 'perfectly in character because it reminds us that we are in the country where persons of that class are always at hand to be employed in constructing such simple ornaments'

He warns against making oneself ridiculous and could almost be speaking to Paxton here 'Men who have long been engaged in active pursuits, will in laying out their grounds, be desirous of indulging the peculiar fancies which have originated in their habits of life'. He reassures with the example of a retired naval man who erects a few naval ornaments around his estate 'does not commit so glaring an absurdity' as the man who transports tons of rocks for an 'improver to build them into a picturesque pile'. He goes on to say that a merchant who 'studs his garden ground with statues to commerce' attracts approval rather than not, for his honesty about his career (Hornor, 1813:58).

Hornor (1813:61) believed that there can be no one template for the laying out of grounds. Improvers 'ought to assist than to alter nature, always adapting their designs to the 'genius loci.' There should not be an overabundance of the picturesque as 'artificial variety and intricacy is most tiresome'.

He returns to the real subject of his polemic, his services, discussing how he can provide more detailed plans for small places which can cost as much as plans for larger estates with less detail. He has studied the art of landscaping and improving his technique of 'pictural delineation' in the hope that landowners will obtain his services to advise on the landscape of their estates which 'cannot be so satisfactorily performed as by a pictorial plan.' (1813:66).

Like Repton, Hornor hoped to have his landscaping services retained after the plan and album of watercolours had been created. However there is no evidence to show that this ever happened; most estate owners just wanted the pretty book as a marketing device or memento. Hornor's albums like so many of Repton's were a failure in that they did not result in landscaping commissions.

Perhaps the real problem was that Repton and Hornor arrived at these estates at a time when the landscape in them had already been substantially altered in the mid to late 18$^{th}$ century and was maturing nicely from a Brownian smoothness, to a roughened maturity that suited the prevailing picturesque ethic.

**13. Hornor's Welsh Period**

Armed with his mysterious surveying device and apparent recent experience of drawing plans of Scottish estates (though no evidence has come to light to prove

that he spent time there). Hornor set his sights on the landowning classes in south Wales, some of them newly rich through commerce and industry.

In 1814 he received commissions in Wales and in April of that year started advertising in the South Wales newspapers for further work. He was successful in attracting commissions from the vales of Taff and Neath. Four out of the six main landowners in Neath as Hyde notes, asked him to undertake 'pictural surveys' of their holdings.

Hornor completed a plan of the Briton Ferry Estate, and below this a long panorama of the view at Briton Ferry for Lord Jersey. The huge plan on its own measures, 144 inches by 111 inches. At Rheola, an estate belonging to John Edwards, Hornor created a map measuring 112 inches by 84 inches. It composes a plan of the estate, and as above a panorama of Rheola and the Vale of Neath across the bottom.

Hyde (1977:18) believes that these plans showed that as well as being an, 'ingenious surveyor, Hornor was a very capable artist.' He describes as, 'sumptuous' the albums of drawings which Hornor produced and notes that Hornor liberally uses Repton's famous landscape gardeners device of the hinged cut out which enables the viewer to see before and after views of a scene. Hornor used this to show 'night' and 'day' in the Rheola section of one of the albums.

Hornor's painting of Rheola House shows the family and 'One feels that the artist knows these people; he is not their servant, he is their friend. They not only pay him, and handsomely, but also admire him and enjoy his company' (Hyde, 1977:26). Another scene shows Hornor with a party of friends, probably members of the Edwards family on Bwa Maen. In the accompanying commentary Hornor informs us, that it was a very windy day so 'he erected a screen from the weather, and set to work tracing the objects before him with the aid of a camera lucida invented by himself' but the wind scatters his humble drawings and equipment, (Fig.2).

It is thought that Hornor produced at least nine versions of this album. To give an idea of the costs involved for the purchasers; for a single album, smaller than the others 13 inches by 20 inches, with, 'exquisite little drawings measuring 4

Figure 3 - A watercolour painting of the dower house at Rheola, where visiting bachelors were housed by Thomas Hornor (NMW 21718). This image shows comparable features to the Middleton Hall paintings, for example; the rustic bridge and the climbers on the verandah supports.

inches by 8 inches and a panorama 62 inches long, he charged Watson Taylor Esq, M.P. 500 guineas' (Hyde, 1977:19).

In addition he was engaged in making 'pictural surveys' during this period in South Wales. Hyde calculates that between 1816 and 1820 Hornor was earning at least 1,000 per year. According to the Bank of England's Inflation Calculator this represents approximately £82,000 annually in today's money. His unique way of mapping estates, his inventions, and perhaps most of all his charismatic personality had made him a rich man. When he returned to London, his Welsh earnings enabled him to live in style.

When Hornor left Wales in 1820, it is possible that he had exhausted the small market of Welsh landowners with the ready cash to spend on his albums which were after all luxury items. Or perhaps he felt ready to return to the larger canvas of London with a new and more ambitious project with which to test his lately honed surveying skills.

**14. 'Not surveys but pictures'**

The scale of his new venture seems incredible to modern eyes; using his camera lucida and telescopes, Hornor's intention was to create a $360^0$ panorama of London taken from the top of St Paul's cathedral. According to Jenkins, in the early $19^{th}$ century the panorama was as fashionable as the latest novel by Scott, Hornor naturally wanted to tap into this market. When repairs were underway above the dome, he attached what can only be described as a small shed from which to sketch his drawings, within the scaffolding erected by C.R. Cockerell (the son of Samuel Pepys Cockerell).

Hammond in *The Camera Obscura, A Chronicle* (1981) relates how 'a Morning Post journalist visited Hornor and was invited to look into the apparatus. Through the 'blood-red ocean of vapours' they watched the city far below. 'It was as if the world were turning at their feet, he wrote' (Hyde, 1981:119).

Hornor developed a new lithographic process for these prints of London which could be coloured 'to give the effect of highly finished drawings'. But they failed to attract much interest and were never issued.

Hornor now became obsessed with a new project on an even larger scale with the help of financial backer Rowland Stephenson MP and banker. He planned to create a tourist attraction in the form of a large building with a domed roof (only the dome of St Paul's was larger) which he christened 'The Colosseum' in which he could display a giant panorama of London to which crowds would flock to marvel at.

Hornor's panorama was meant to be awe-inspiring, it was to be viewed from two viewing platforms which were arrived at by an "ascending platform," or lift, a new invention which was a mere by product of Hornor's obsession with the panorama itself "The whole" said a newspaper report 'forms an assemblage of grandeur, unparalleled in art' (Hyde, R 1977:30).

Hornor caused conservatories and waterfalls to be constructed around the building, putting into practice his idea that landscape gardening was an art, having 'the necromantic , or talismanic power of creating mountains, dells, cascades, and the most delicious scenes of Paradise from and within a small and limited piece of flat ground' (Hyde 1976:14).

Brewer (2007:245) draws attention to the fact that Hornor's view of London 'in certain respects, not least in its vastness' agreed with the Burkean sublime. Hornor working in the topographical tradition was comfortable with 'vast' but obviously had too sunny an outlook to dwell on the 'horrors of the sublime'. Although there are hints of it in his industrial painting 'Rolling Mills' which atmospherically portrays an ironworks at Merthyr Tydfil at night which appears almost to be lit with strobe lighting. Another example is 'Night' which depicts an almost Blakean shrouded 'spirit' hovering over the Vale of Neath (Brewer, J. 2007:237).

There are echoes of this in the panorama Hornor created for Middleton Hall where the edges of the Park seem to be surrounded by ominous purple thunderclouds. Of course there may be a purely practical reason for this. Some of the Park at Middleton Hall is surrounded by Cawdor Estate farms which may explain the clouded periphery. Jenkins (1971:41) also points out that that in some of the panoramas he created there was a foreshortening in the left and right hand sides of

the picture probably created by the lens of his contraption, but this ‘distortion is not unpleasing’.

The Great Panorama of London, covered 40,000 square feet of canvas, nearly one acre and took six years to complete. Parris the artist contracted by Hornor found that his drawings were like ‘an ill-devised puzzle, the parts of which no dexterity could fit together.’(Hyde, 1977:33). Hornor’s fraudulent backer eventually ran away to America to escape his debts and he himself was now in severe financial difficulty. Increasingly frantic, in January 1829, he opened the unfinished Colosseum to the public, attempting to generate an income. Queen Adelaide visited but was greeted by Parris. Hornor had also disappeared, later resurfacing in New York. He appeared to eke out his last few years in America in reduced circumstances, having lost his persuasive charm and artistic powers. He died according to two different reports, either insane, or by the roadside.

Hyde feels that he was belittled by his contemporaries, for example; Charles Dickens referred to him as 'not the young gentleman who ate mince-pies with his thumb, but the man of Colosseum notoriety' (1977:45). However more recent commentators have appreciated his talents more fully. Ellis Jenkins felt that 'At his best Hornor is as good as any of his contemporaries except Turner, Girtin, and the few who could soar; even at his poorest he is never banal, [he is] always competent and interesting' (1977:47).

Hyde concludes that Hornor was successful to some degree where his ‘pictural’ surveys are concerned in ‘reuniting what in earlier centuries had been regarded as two aspects of the cartographer’s art - the plan and the prospect. He did not, however, succeed in re-establishing the tradition. He had some admirers but no followers.'(1977:47)

Rees (1980:60) feels that Hornor's works show ‘the incompatibility of pictorialism and accuracy, but his failure did not signal the end of relationships between art and cartography’. Map makers still use artistic techniques and bring ‘artistic sensibility’ to their craft.

Hammond notes that several other ‘panoramists’ used the camera obscura

including William Daniell, whose views of Indian Architecture heavily influenced Sezincote. Brewer (2007:233) remarks that panoramas were almost a 'cult' in the early 19th century as their 'vast individual canvasses spectacularised a moment'

Peter Otto in *Multiplying Worlds: Romanticism, Modernity, and the Emergence of Virtual Reality* (2011) remarks that Hornor's albums 'draw the reader/viewer through panoramic space'. This is true in the case of his Middleton Hall work where there is a filmic, slideshow quality to the arrangement of text and images. The plan of the Park gives the viewer a serene omniscient overview, which then swoops in for close-up snapshots of the estate, which portray the rich variety of activity and scenery at ground level.

Hyde (1977:47) believes that when Hornor's 'pictural' surveys are scrutinised 'one is puzzled, then enchanted, then doubtful. What is supposed to be relief? What is supposed to be cloud shadow? ....Hornor is really indulging in gimmickry: his 'pictural' surveys are not surveys but pictures; they are certainly not working documents'. They give an impression of fastidious accuracy' but 'Hornor's pictural surveys are not surveys but pictures' (Hyde, 1976:6).

> Hornor was perhaps too ingenious, too impetuous, too much of a showman, too anxious always to satisfy the vanity of his wealthy patrons. In the story of British land surveying his must be a supreme example of misdirected genius.
>
> (Hyde, 1977:47)

## 15. 'Enchantingly romantic' and 'Landscapes so sublime' A Comparative Landscape Analysis of the Park at Middleton Hall

The only documentary evidence we have for the early 19th century landscape at Middleton hall is Thomas Hornor's album completed in 1815 and an extract from *The Memoirs of the Harcourt family; a tale for young ladies* published in 1813.

The latter was dedicated to Miss Caroline Paxton which suggests that the Harcourts' visit to Middleton Hall was no accident. Caroline Paxton was Sir William Paxton's youngest daughter who later married an Irish doctor a distinguished botanist called Daniel Chambers McCreight.

The Harcourt memoir describes Middleton Hall 18 years after the new hall had been built and much of the park and gardens had been laid out. It is not known who the author of the memoir is, but it is thought to have been one of the children; Henry was 15, Amelia 13, Caroline 11, and Louis 9.

The first Earl Harcourt died in 1777 leaving the titles to his two sons. Mrs Harcourt was the widow of the eldest son. The Colonel in the memoir is her brother-in-law who became the third Earl. Nuneham Park in Oxfordshire was one of their estates; not dissimilar to Middleton Hall, it was a white house built on a slight rise above the Thames and framed by trees, in gently rolling parkland. Capability Brown was responsible for its Park which the local village was demolished to make way for. This incident was the inspiration for Goldsmith's poem The Deserted Village.

Hornor's Middleton Hall album which contained a narrative tour of the estate with 14 watercolour views and a larger plan of the park is much more self-contained than his other Welsh albums which were more generic and ranged across the landscape of the South Wales valleys over land which belonged to several different owners. At Middleton Hall he confines himself to the park apart from one view which is a panorama of the park and land beyond, taken from the hill in the east looking west towards Carmarthen and the aerial survey or plan, which is a bird's eye view of the park and one of his 'picturalised maps'.

Thomas Hornor's album of Middleton Hall was arranged as an hour long circular tour of the Park starting with the westward approach to the mansion. The numbers in red on the estate plan show the locations where each sketch was made.

Hornor himself describes the views or he has painted as being 'taken' by him which sounds to modern ears almost as if he was taking photographs. Hornor's albums do seem to prefigure the family albums which became common after the invention of photography. His views are not just landscapes but snapshots of the family at play.

There has been some uncertainty over whether Hornor painted what he saw at Middleton hall or whether he was painting idealised views of what Paxton could have if he were willing to pay for it; shades of Repton here. However all of the evidence points to the fact that Hornor painted what he saw with perhaps the

exception of the bird's eye view of the estate which would have been rendered via his camera lucida, the accuracy of which must be called into question. The camera lucida was patented in 1807 and differs from the camera obscura in that it did not need any special light conditions in order to work.

This is supported by the Harcourt extract, which agrees with Hornor's narrative on many features of the landscape. It has been noted in other research regarding the accuracy of Hornor's views, that some of his panoramas are shaded out around the edge which suggests that the images produced by the camera lucida were out of focus or distorted at their periphery. It is also possible that these wide views were the result of a composite of images; just as today software for digital photography is able to stitch together individual photos to create impressive panoramas.

The framed dimensions of the Hornor watercolours extant for Middleton Hall are as follows: a panorama measuring 112 x 48 cm, 5 watercolour views all measuring 60 x 43cm, and the survey measuring 70 x 53cm. The album was slightly smaller in dimension than the other South Wales albums and contained fewer watercolours, but was not as small as the album for which Hornor received 500 guineas.

**'Station1'**

The watercolour from 'station 1' is missing, the paintings were stolen in the 1980's and when the album was recovered by the family at auction not all of the paintings were included in the sale.

The first drawing was a view of the mansion from the west which is how visitors would approach from the direction of Swansea. Hornor first describes a lake which 'winds around the base of the hill on which the house is placed'. He notes a bridge on the right which carries another drive from another 'approach' to the house, which 'is connected with several of the green drives through the Park.'

**'Station2'**

This watercolour is the view towards the south aspect of Middleton Hall, what was the front of the house. He quotes from The Beauties of England and Wales (1815)

by Thomas Rees who gives us a picture of the estate when complete. The new Middleton Hall he describes as 'perhaps the most splendid mansion in South Wales' the interior full of 'elegance and taste' the exterior 'magnificence':

> It is situated on a gentle elevation in the midst of a pleasant vale, that branches off to the eastward from the Tywi .....Sir William Paxton has paid great attention to the improvement of the grounds, which are ornamented by numerous and flourishing plantations. The tower lately erected here, after an elegant design by Mr. Cockerell, is entitled to particular mention. It is situated at the northern extremity of the park, on an eminence that immediately overlooks the Vale of Tywi, and commands a prospect of prodigious extent.
>
> (Rees, 1815:334)

The old oak in the foreground of station 2 is known as the *Dynefor* oak and according to Hornor 'has long been celebrated as a landmark'. He praises the venerable nature of this tree 'adorning with its majestic shade the polished lawn that surrounds it.'

The figure of a gentleman on horseback, leading or training another horse may be one of Sir William's sons. There is a simple iron archway with a gate, through which carriages can pass next to a kind of turnstile and a simple iron fence. A hunting dog appears at the bottom left of the picture looking at his master, ready for sport.

Hornor guides us into the mansion for a brief examination of its decorations and suggests that its delights should be saved until we revisit it at the end of the tour. He returns outside to sketch the Park.

**'Station 3'**

Station 3 shows the view from the north side of the house. This 'commands' the view on which Nelson's Tower stands 'the wooded hill crowned with the Tower' (Hornor, 1815).

A decade after Middleton Hall was built, sometime between 1805 and 1808 Paxton re-engaged Samuel Pepys Cockerell to design a tower in memory of the great naval hero Admiral Nelson. A pencil drawing of the tower in the RIBA archive

attributed to C. R. Cockerell dated 1802 must be a mistake as he was a child then, in adulthood becoming an even more successful architect than his father.

The style of the tower is gothic and appropriately military naturally, in light of its dedicatee. As an eye-catcher in the landscape it is very successful as it can be seen for many miles in all directions. Eye-catchers were often silhouetted on the skyline in view of the house of the landowner who caused them to be erected. The route of a carriage drive from Middleton Hall to the tower describes a snail shell route around the hill on which it stands and can be clearly seen on old drawings and some aerial photographs.

The tower has been described as 'A successful attempt to create the picturesque'. This tower was only one of many memorials to Nelson which often took the form of a structure in the landscape in the form of columns, and statues There is another 'Nelson's Tower' at Forres in Scotland. Towers also could represent 'parliamentary liberty' (Rutherford & Lovies, 2012:109) and most of them 'stood at the park boundary straddling the divide between the Arcadian landscape and the rude agricultural world beyond' (2012:110) or on estate land 'as outliers' such as Paxton's Tower itself and Broadway Tower in Worcestershire.

A later traveller notes the fact that although built by Paxton to commemorate Nelson, the tower is known by his name rather than his naval hero's as it still is today although mistaking this nomenclature as complimentary:

> The imposing, castellated, triple-towered monument to Nelson, crowning a hill in Middleton Park, and looking almost as martial as the surrounding castles themselves, was erected by a former owner of the estate. Sir William Paxton, and, in an unexpected result, is a greater monument to himself, for to the country-folk it is "Paxton's Tower" rather than Nelson's.
>
> (Harper, 1912)

Paxton is still remembered mistakenly by locals as a vain man who wanted his name to be perpetuated by a grandiose folly.

Hornor draws our attention to the 'rich distance' of the Towy valley in Station 3:

> The sweep of sylvan scenery diversified with white cottages and bounded by the distant hills, compose a scene which the eye reposes on with delight and quits with reluctance.

**Figure 4 - Station2**

**Figure 5 - Station 3**

The Harcourt extract also notes these humble yet attractive dwellings 'which at various distances were seen peeping through the trees.' The house, 'situated on a gentle eminence, seemed to smile protection on the cottages'.

The Harcourt's are approaching Middleton Hall from Llanarthney village in the north. The extract describes the landscape from this aspect 'the ground sloped gently down to a lake, fringed with trees, and inhabited by a number of beautiful swans.' In 1818 George Hardinge a JP from Breconshire published *The Miscellaneous Works, in Prose and Verse* which includes a humorous poem dedicated to WP Esq entitled *The Petition of two Swans in the lake at Middleton hall*:

> Send a lady for each,
> And between the two couples you'll hear of no breach
> Among swans infidelity is never known;
> And though wedded the pairs never part from their own.
> All that breathe in your scope the benevolence praise,
> That has catered for each happy nights, happy days.
> We alone are the charter of Nature denied,
> When the gardener, and groom have their loves at their side.
>
> (Hardinge, 1818:61)

The Harcourt extract goes on to praise the scenery in general terms 'The fertility of the grounds, the well disposed plantations, and broad expanse of the lakes, excited the admiration of the party, and filled them with pleasing sensations as they approached the hall.'

This drawing forth of emotions that a manmade landscape can evoke had been popularised by picturesque theory, the visitors were reading the landscape effectively, obedient to current practice and the cult of sensation. Intense emotion as an aesthetic experience was highly valued in this era of Romanticism. Created landscapes like that at Middleton Hall were meant to not only be admired but to stimulate arrange of emotions in the viewer.

Hornor mentions Grongar Hill and Dryslwyn Castle but these are too far away to be seen. The eye instead is drawn to the portico and steps of the mansion garnished with Coade stone pots overflowing with flowers and a flower bed with

further pots edged with ornamental trellis work possibly in wood or painted ironwork below the terrace. These features were popularised by Humphry Repton who reinstated trellises, balustrades and formal terraces and flower gardens next to the house, instead of the lawns of an earlier generation of landscape gardeners which swept virtually right up to the front door.

Hornor in 1815 still regards this type of scenery 'the verdant lawn, the expanse of water' as praiseworthy 'water was the most prestigious feature in the landscape park' (Rutherford & Lovie, 2012:26).

It has been said that the taste of the 18th century was aristocratic but by the Regency it had become 'democratic' more 'flexible and intuitive'. In gardens this expressed itself as more 'dressed grounds near the house, with sinuous shrubberies flowerbeds, trellis and ornate garden seats' linking the house and garden together (Batey, 1995:5). Repton advised the owners of Longer Hall to install a decorative iron fence that separated the dressed grounds from the grazed scene similar to that around the mansion at Middleton Hall. Batey (1995) notes that the 'bald and bare' landscape that dominated the settings of large houses in the 18th century was seen by the latter half of the century as 'false and mistaken taste' by the purveyors of the picturesque.

Llyn mawr curves around to the left in the middle ground behind which is one of the many paths or drives. On the right is a boat with white sails in one of the sheltered 'bays' of the lake, its progress barred by a white bridge with five arches.

The edge of this bay is framed by deciduous woodland and girdled with a fringe of more mature, quick growing conifers, known as nursery trees which were often planted next to what was regarded as the woodland proper for temporary protection. The intention was for these trees to be harvested when their job was done, but there is some evidence from paintings done by members of the Abadam family, later incumbents of the estate, that the conifers were not removed and became over mature. Of course by the latter half of the 19th century fashions had changed; American introductions which included many new coniferous species and the gloomy Victorian shrubbery had become pre-eminent.

In this 'animated scene' as Hornor characterises it, on the steps below the portico, stand three figures; two bonneted women, one holding a small parasol,

and a man looking out over the lake with a telescope towards the boat. Another female figure beneath the portico appears to be reading a book.

A gravelled walk runs in front of the house and in the far right distance across the lake is a stock proof railed path, running alongside the lake matching a further railed lakeside walk on the far left of the picture. Behind the latter are two further drives or paths. The pastoral scene is enhanced by sheep as well as black and white cattle.

The Paxtons were not at home when the Harcourt family visited and so they were conducted around the house and the park by an aged retainer whose 'silver locks made Mrs Harcourt think of the bards of former times.' After seeing the house they were led 'along a winding gravel-walk' by the servant 'which was sometimes obscured by the spreading branches of the trees uniting and forming a verdant arch over the head: at other times it was quite open to the sun.' As they proceeded, a range of landscape 'features' were revealed 'in quick succession; at one time the hall was the predominant object, then the tower, and various hills, some near, others at a great distance, many of them clothed in woods, enlivened by white cottages.' Whilst on their right the 'chrystal lake expanded itself' and on the left 'rose the green sloping fields.' Andrews (1989:62) notes this new attitude which was encouraged by the picturesque movement 'There is a closer involvement, a willingness to submerge oneself in the landscape ... one is moving through rather than surveying it.' As at Hafod that other great 'sublime landscaped estate' not all of the landscape is revealed from the house, the visitor is thus induced to explore it in person.

**'Station 4'**

Station 4 is the view from the bank of Llyn Mawr looking back at the mansion. Hornor explains that this spot is reached from the path on the left of the previous drawing, which leads us 'through a shady walk' made in 'an agreeable line by the margin' of the lake.

Hornor sees the lake as 'not only a pleasing object in itself but as the means of multiplying and varying the beautiful views around it'. He points out that boating

on the lake adds an extra dimension 'to the range of rural amusements' on offer at Middleton Hall.

A boating or picnic party is about to commence. In the foreground two relaxed well dressed couples make conversation, whilst an excitable boy holding a parasol in one hand and the hand of one of the women is literally skipping with excitement at the treat to come. Meanwhile, the boatman is bringing the boat about whilst a labourer heaves on a rope to bring it to the bank and a liveried house servant appears to be bringing baskets filled with bottles of drink and food. A lap dog eyes the boat nervously from the shore. And further on the left in the shallows are a pair of swans. The boat has pretty pink sails and an ornamental covered canopy with ruched curtains in the same colour, under which one of the party is already ensconced. There is another smaller boat further up the lake towards the house with two occupants, one a slightly more portly figure, possibly Sir William Paxton himself.

The house sits on a small hill in the distance, striking in its pure white appearance, framed by substantial trees probably oaks and other deciduous plantings, as well as some flowering cherries, hug the lakeside, girdled with the obligatory conifer 'nurses'.

A boat-house is marked near Station 4 on the 1880s Ordnance Survey map, which explains the boating theme. Station 4 on Hornor's plan of the park looks as if it had been part rubbed out and the watercolour itself appears to have been painted in between the faintly marked 4 and station 5.

It is likely there was a boat-house in 1815 to house the elaborate gondola like boat, but it was not visible because of the trees surrounding it and thus not recorded by Hornor. Boat-houses were often built in the rustic picturesque style during this period, as at Port Eliot and Pentillie Castle in Cornwall (Rutherford and Lovie, 2012). It had disappeared on the maps by the 1900s.

**'Stations 5 and 6'**

There are no images for these stations. Continuing on the same path Hornor describes the 'lower lake which is happily formed in a sequestered and well wooded little valley'. The missing image shows a 'harbour' and the two bridges one of which

**Figure 6 - Station 4**

**Figure 7 - Station 7**

leads to the ‘dell’ ‘which contains many characteristic beauties developed in the course of the walk’. The other image shows the route, a ‘path by the smaller bridge leads to the chalybeate spring and bath’.

**‘Station 7’**

The chalybeate spring and bath which Hornor calls the ‘Grotto of Hygrea’ are both ‘agreeably placed in a flower garden’. The white plastered bath house or grotto appears to be a thatch roofed building with a porch underneath which rustic benches have been placed. White flowered climbing plants, jasmine or possibly roses adorn its two supporting pillars. The spring in front of the bath house is accessed down some steps and a gentleman is seen descending these with a tankard in hand.

In the foreground we can see the flower garden, with some of the tender or unusual specimens planted in terracotta pots sunk into the ground. It is difficult to make out varieties of the plants but it looks like there are larkspurs, lupins, daisies, digitalis, campanulas, hollyhocks as well as flowering shrubs behind the two ladies and a gentleman conversing on the rustic bench in the middle of the garden.

This picture shows the bosky nature of this mini spa at Pont Felin-gât, there are large deciduous trees, maturing conifers and saplings as well as shrubs.

In the distance, behind the figures on the bench, is what appears to be a Chinese or rustic bridge across a narrowing of the lake. Strangely the scene does not include the mill which was positioned across a small waterfall from where the figures are seated.

Hornor in his narrative goes on to list the medicinal properties of the spring water. The bath adjacent to the spring is described by Hornor as a ‘tepid bath ... furnished with complete apparatus for that purpose.’

Pipes were apparently laid from the spring to the outside of the park wall to enable the public to freely access the health benefits. Hornor notes that ‘a house for the accommodation of visitors has also been erected’ this may be the Emlyn Arms in Llanarthne which may have offered further spa treatments from a tank in its roof. The roofline still today is unusual in that it is stepped, (Lloyd, T. pers comm).

Thomas Rees in *The Beauties of England and Wales* published in 1815 mentions the chalybeate springs that had been discovered in the park and that William Paxton had displayed what was probably the first bilingual health and safety notice in Wales explaining how to use the waters and also for what complaints they might be beneficial. The spa appears to be for the private use of the family only now. The attempt to launch it as a spa must have been unsuccessful:

> The baths which are there mentioned prove to be but one, which may, however, be used warm or cold, as it is furnished with the necessary conveniences for heating the water. This bath is situated within the wall of Middleton Hall Park, and is designed merely for the use of the family. The water is, however, conveyed from the spring in stone pipes to the outside of the wall, where there is a house for the accommodation of visitors, and where baths may easily be constructed, should the influx of valetudinarians be such as to call for them.
>
> (Rees, 1815:334)

There was a precedent for this, sulphur baths were erected at Kedleston Hall in Debyshire in 1759 and were opened 'to the public as a business venture and achieving success as a miniature spa' (Rolf, 2011:9).

The Harcourt extract picks up its description at this point from the mansion:

> This walk of about half a mile conducted them over a rustic bridge to a little spot, which seemed to be the work of fairies. A wild sort of garden, two small buildings, and a trickling spring, were before them; on the right was a waterfall, the water of which passing under the bridge on which they stood, precipitated itself with much violence over masses of broken rocks.

The appropriate emotional response has been called forth, the visitors are rendered speechless at this 'romantic' spot:

> For some moments they gazed in silence, unable to express the pleasure they felt at a scene so enchantingly romantic. The guide informed them that this lovely little spot was called the Spring on account of a chalybeate spring which had here been discovered, and found to possess great medicinal virtues.

The Harcourt extract describes the spa buildings and Paxton's kind gesture in sharing the benefits of the spring with everybody:

> One of the buildings was a bath supplied from the spring, both the bath and the spring were private, for the use of the family; but Sir William, unwilling that the poor should be deprived of what experience had proved to be highly beneficial, had been at the expence of having the water conducted by a pipe into the road, so that the use of it was free to everybody: the other building was a grotto, not finished, but which afforded and agreeable retreat from the sun.

Is the 'mill' at Pont Felin-gât a local misunderstanding based on the later place name of this part of the estate? The Harcourt's description of an unfinished 'grotto' might refer to this building which might have been constructed on the outside to look like a mill, therefore artificially increasing the rustic charm of the place.

Grottos were often associated with bath houses often containing plunge pools of ice cold water. They could be highly decorated with shells or rocks with glittering ornamental stalactites as at Ascot and Painshill. Often their decoration devolved upon the women of the house as at Walton. It is a charming thought, Lady Anne Paxton and her daughters busying themselves in the adornment of the grotto. William Paxton with his commercial connections as far as India could easily have imported decorative stones and shells for it. It is likely however that the grotto remained unfinished when the spa failed to take off.

**'Station 8'**

The painting for station 8 is one of the lost images. It portrays the view from a 'bower' on the east side of the lower lake 'which commands an elegant vista of the lake and its wooded banks' terminated by the portico of the mansion. Hornor characterises this scene as 'this little Grasmere of Wales'. The tour continues on through the 'dingle whose banks are overhung with wood and diversified with the wilder productions of nature grouped and combined in infinite variety.'

The Harcourt extract also refers to a glimpse of the mansion from this point in the tour:

> In this part the lake appeared highly romantic, narrowing in some places, and being lost among the trees, which here feather down to the very edge of the water: occasional openings gave some pleasing object to view; among others the hall presented itself, majestically rising as it were out of a wood.

The Harcourt family sit on a 'rustic bench' to admire the scene here:

> The smooth expanse of water presented the surrounding scenery with the faithfulness of a mirror. The various foliage of the trees, enriched with the yellow tints of Autumn; the distant hills rearing high their summits, tinged with the purple hue of evening; the half seen bridge and the ethereal vault, adorned with light clouds, were reflected in softened shades from the unruffled bosom of the lake: the murmuring of a brook at a small distance conspired, with the surrounding view, to charm the mind and invite repose.

The Colonel their uncle is moved to write a few lines of poetry and Amelia one of the sisters sketches the hall:

> Sweet are these scenes of innocence and ease.
> Where Art and Nature both unite to please'
> Here lawns far spreading open to the day'
> And trees embowering shield the sun's bright ray;
> Here chrystal lakes their liquid mirrors show,
> And streams wild rippling o'er rough pebbles flow;
> Here falling waters charm' enraptured eye,
> And massive rocks in broken fragments lie.

**'Station 9'**

The watercolour for this station is also missing. Hornor explains that this walk follows a fast flowing stream, where the 'dale' widens 'into a little valley happily formed into a flower garden which has an enchanting effect after the gloom of the entrance'. Here a 'rustic arcade forms a pleasing covered walk and affords support to the various creepers which form themselves into graceful festoons'

The Harcourt memoir aligns with Hornor's description here but gives more detail:

> They now continued on a winding path which conducted them into an arched way, overshadowed with jessamines and honeysuckles that led into a hermit's garden. This was a retired sheltered spot, planted with shrubs and flowers. Geraniums and myrtles were here growing in wild luxuriance; a large palm tree in the centre spread its branches over a seat which seemed to invite the visitors to rest.

The climbing Jasmines and Honeysuckles on the 'arched way' were familiar plants, Mathew Boulton's garden in Soho, Birmingham was supplied with five sorts of Honeysuckle by a nurseryman in 1798 (Ballard & Loggie, 2009:37). Boulton laid out a flower garden for his daughter in the grounds surrounding

a ‘hermitage’ for which 304 herbaceous plants and 18 varieties of carnations and pinks were ordered.

The picturesque concept of ‘forest sceneries’ intended to look like the natural gardens in forest clearings was gaining ground in the early 19th century, they included a mixture of flowers ‘such as hollyhocks, martagon lilies, peonies, foxgloves, daylilies, sunflowers and michaelmas daisies’ (Batey, 1995:46); as well as climbers, passion flowers, clematis, everlasting peas, flaming nasturtium; flowering shrubs and small trees; ‘acacia, dogwood, viburnum, Judas tree, lilac, philadelphus, brooms as well as sweetbriars and scotch roses.’

It is likely that the geraniums referred to are not native cranesbills but the South African pelargonium. The heyday of pelargoniums was in the early 19th century, they were South African plants brought back to Britain by sailors and collectors and were planted in the ground as well as in pots.

The reference to a Palm is even more interesting as West Bengal where Paxton was based during his time in the sub-continent, is one of the areas in India where the Coconut Palm ‘Cocos nucifera’ is traditionally grown. Did he have this placed here so he could sit beneath its fronds and dream of his youthful adventures in India?

The Harcourt extract makes reference to a hermit’s bath as well as garden, it is curious that Hornor makes no reference to this in his commentary, although he appears to depict a cave entrance in the following painting. It is not likely that a hermit was ever in residence, many hermitages were constructed from the 18th century onwards purely for show, as just another incident on in the Park, in order to produce a particular sensation in the viewer.

The Harcourts continue through a valley with a ‘rivulet of clearest water’ on one side and on the other ‘lofty hanging woods seemed to rise into the clouds’. As time was getting on, (they had to be in Carmarthen for tea as the Colonel reminded them) they were forced to hurry ‘to the hermit’s bath’. The walk here became wilder, the gravelled path giving way to ‘a green and sloping’ path which led them down:

> into a most romantic little dell: at the bottom of which rippled a rivulet: the sides were clothed with trees, and at the extremity appeared a small cascade dashing itself with miniature fury from rock to rock till it reached the bottom, where it formed a pool, which has sometimes been used as a bath and which gave the name to the place.

.Mrs Harcourt finds she 'cannot find words to express my admiration', only repeating that it 'is enchantingly beautiful'. The Colonel reminds her that he had told her 'that there were spots in Wales that might vie with vale of Tempe' and this is one of them.' Mrs Harcourt agrees and adds that 'this place does not at all appear indebted to art for any of its beauties, here all is natural, wild and charming.' Tempe is a valley in Thessaly praised by the classic poets for its matchless beauty (Harden, B. 2000). They tore themselves away 'from his enchanting scene' and turning back to the spring their guide 'led them to the road by a private door'. They made 'proper acknowledgements to him for his civility', returning to Llanarthney where they found their 'horses already put to, and the carriage waiting for them.'

**'Station 10'**

Hornor next depicts 'a bold and impetuous' waterfall which is still in existence. He notes that it is artificial but that it 'has all the appropriate character of a natural cascade, heightened in its effect by the wooded scenery which surrounds it.'

It looks like Hornor is showing himself painting the scene nearer to the waterfall. Someone is standing looking over his shoulder, might it be Sir William? There is a rustic bridge in front of the top of the waterfall, it would have been a thrilling and awful experience to cross this with the water rushing over the edge crashing onto the rocks below.

Below the waterfall is another rustic bridge across the river to what appears to be a cave framed by a rustic arch. Hermitages were popular throughout the 18th century. They were 'notionally intended as a dwelling' (Rutherford & Lovie, 2012:63) but were often unoccupied and more like single roomed summerhouses, constructed in the rustic style often 'embowered in contemplative dark pleasure grounds or woodland plantings of trees and shrubs' (Rutherford & Lovie, 2012:63). The late 18th century hermitage at Fonthill was a cavern set into a park hillside, like the 'Hermit's cave' at Middleton Hall. However Walpole signalled the death knell

for this style of landscaping ‘It is almost comic to set aside a quarter of one’s garden to be melancholy in’ (in Rutherford & Lovie, 2012:66).

The saplings seem etiolated and contorted and more Picturesque in the original meaning of the term. Perhaps this area had recently been felled so that the waterfall could be viewed more easily. The herbaceous plants appear to be ferns and marsh marigolds, natives planted for a more natural effect, or perhaps they have germinated due to the increased light levels.

**Station 11**

There is no painting for this station. The tour proceeds upwards through the dingle to a large stone bridge, leaving it to join one of the green drives ‘for a more general view of the grounds’. The ‘green drives’ were longer circuits made possible by the improved design of carriages, the phaetons which ‘conveyed visitors effortlessly past the pictorial scenes’ (Lasdun, 1991:98).

The views become expansive, the landscape being one of ‘undulating lines’ and ‘variegated surface of ground’ with an ‘undivided range of pasture and lively effects of variegated foliage’. Hornor notes that ‘the several pieces of water have the effect of one connected sheet, which appearing by glimpses amongst the trees by its side gives to the whole a finish of animation and beauty.’

What is really tantalising here is that Hornor states that the reason this station was chosen was due to its ‘proximity’ to the site of the old mansion ‘rather than as affording the best representation on the scene’ which doesn’t appear very logical. Does he mean that the old mansion is still extant or does ‘proximity’ suggest that its site is only vaguely known. Why did he choose to draw from a site that doesn’t give the best view?

**Station 12**

There is no picture for this station which Hornor drew from the margin of the lake where ‘we may take a seat in an agreeable flower garden formed in a little promontory from which the mansion is seen to associate advantageously with the finished domestic character of the scene.’

**Figure 8 - Station 10**

**Figure 9 - Station 13**

**Station 13**

The painting taken from station 13 shows a private bath house for the family, in woods below the hall facing Waun las 'The bath-house was for the more hardy who relished the health-giving properties of a cold dip in the privacy of their own grounds' (Rutherford & Lovie, 2012:115).

Hornor describes it as 'appropriately placed in a secluded situation and well screened by a grove which intercepts it from the lawn behind'. Another faithful pair of swans are seen here again in the lake to the right of the bath-house and there is a rowing boat moored below it. The bath-house is neo-classical in style, probably built of brick and faced in stucco at the same time as the mansion.

**'Station 14'**

Station 14 is a panorama from the hill to the east of the mansion. Hornor remarks that the 'ride' as this ramble has now become can be varied on horseback by ascending the hill on which the 'tower' stands on a 'road which takes a circuitous direction through an extensive and flourishing plantation, affording at every turn, views ever varying in extent, richness and grandeur: and our admiration is progressively increased by the expanding beauties of the vale as it seems to unfold itself to the eye as we advance.'

Hornor says that despite our growing expectations 'during the ascent' 'the unbounded magnificence of the whole on attaining the summit cannot fail to call forth a spontaneous exclamation of wonder and delight .... a circle of landscapes so sublime in its and general effect' and that the detail 'defies the happiest efforts of pen or pencil' however he hopes that his efforts 'present to the eye and to the mind a comprehensive thought faint vision of the scene.'

**The Plan**

Hornor's plan of the parkland at Middleton Hall is the pièce de résistance of this collection of paintings. It appears from Hornor's dedication to Paxton in the commentary, it looks like he was initially commissioned by Sir William to produce just the plan, who later agreed to have an album of watercolours made as well.

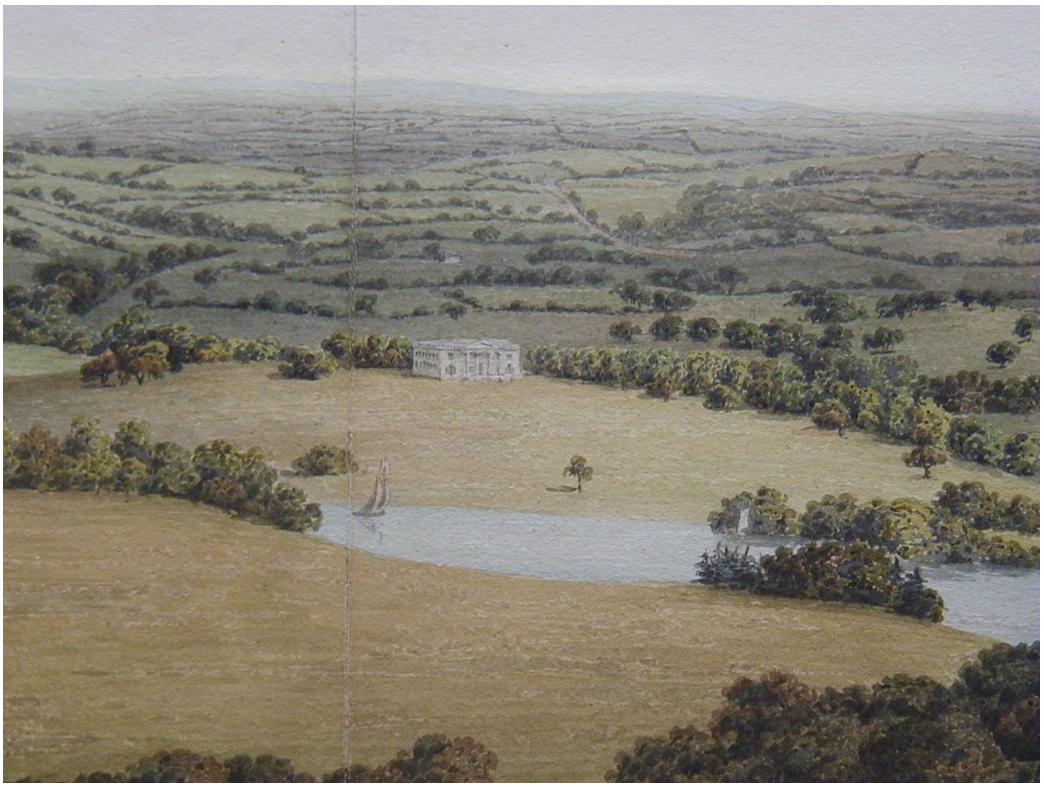

**Figure 10 - Detail from station 14**


**Figure 11 - The Plan**

The Park is ringed by what appear to be ominous thunderclouds, which have the slightly disorienting effect of tipping the viewer into the picture, our focus is on the Park itself rather than the surrounding land, some of which was not part of the Middleton Hall Estate. It is possible that Hornor disguised the lack of focus around the edges of a perspective created by a camera lucida using this technique which appears in a number of his 'pictural' surveys, namely the Plan of the Town and Parish of Kingston Upon Thames (1813) where the north eastern part of the parish is covered by clouds with a figure brandishing a spear and the 'Spirit of the Vale of Neath' where the valley is once again surrounded by clouds and strange ghostly figures are shown in the sky.

A GIS Overlay map was created for this study: showing a detail of the Pont Felin-gât area from Thomas Hornor's plan of the park at Middleton Hall which was overlaid onto the 1880s Ordnance Survey map showing that Hornor was able to be accurate in sections. However, when the whole plan is overlaid onto the 1880s OS map, the mansion, although correct in outline, is far from where it should be, it then becomes clear that it was probably Hornor's desire to 'picturalise' his maps which resulted in the fact that his surveying was not to scale, (see Appendix 2).

## Conclusion

The problem with a many landscape garden terms is their amorphous nature, they have never been defined. Landscape gardens like Middleton Hall also evolve and grow, which makes it difficult to assign to them a period or a label.

What can be deduced is that Middleton Hall responded to landscape fashions in which the rigidly informal landscape of the 18th century, gradually gave way to the return of the gardenesque flower garden at its close, influenced by the Rococo movement which highlighted the decorative along with sinuous lines.

The Rococo flower garden laid out at Nuneham Courtenay has particular relevance to Middleton Hall. This garden was laid out by William Mason in 1770 for Lord Nuneham the son of the first Earl Harcourt, the grandfather of the Harcourt children who visited Middleton Hall in 1813. Mason's flower garden excluded straight lines and was heart shaped like the park at Middleton Hall though obviously much smaller 'with plantings serpentising their way along the edge' (Symes, 1991:27). Given that they dedicated their memoirs to Caroline Paxton, it is tempting to speculate how close the relationship between the Harcourts and the Paxtons was, given the latter family's strong interest in gardening and horticulture reaching back to their 17th century ancestor John Evelyn.

The landscape at Middleton Hall during Paxton's ownership went through several phases that also revealed a range of influences at work. The initial phase consisted of tree planting in belts and clumps and the smoothing out of earlier features such as the old mansion and its formal water gardens as well as the laying out of a wide variety of drives and gravelled paths throughout the park. These features can be characterised as 'Brownian' and may have been devised by Lapidge.

However, the Hornor survey of the park shows that it was not typically Brownian as the belts of trees were broken and were not complete, in addition they did not circle the perimeter but instead, they embraced the house in gentle arcs shielding it from the winds and unsightly views; even the belts of trees at a distance appear to be acknowledging the house and are aligned to be facing it. There are clumps but also scattered plantings of trees. If Lapidge was the guiding hand behind this, he had developed a looser more relaxed style than he had learnt under the

tutelage of Brown. Perhaps he picked this up from Repton who frequently passed on landscaping jobs to Lapidge. Lapidge was in Wales altering Llanarth House, in Monmouthshire in 1792 which is how he may have come by the Middleton Hall commission.

It is easy to see why the William Emes who was active in Wales during the 1790s, has also been linked with the landscape design at Middleton hall because his plans also show this loosened up manner of planting. His design for Oakedge 'shows very sinuous carriage drives, and remarkably natural planting'(Jacques, 1983:85). However he was in partial retirement by 1792.

The second phase of landscaping at Middleton Hall is represented by development at the edges of and outside the park and includes the Gothic Nelson's Tower and the flower garden with associated buildings at Pont Felin-gât. This phase owes much to the Rococo and the ideas propagated by the picturesque movement.

These developments at Middleton hall also embody the Reptonian ethic that includes 'sense and sensibility': that formality should increase nearer the house, 'to mark man's proper domain near the house and its separation from the landscape beyond' (Hunt, 1992:168). Hornor in accord with Repton felt that the excesses of the picturesque should be restrained in order to accommodate the comfort of his clients who required some order as well as some 'sublimity'.

The ultimate result was that as the 19$^{th}$ century progressed; designers like Repton were called in merely to make modifications around the house as the large Brownian parks were maturing nicely. Another factor was that smaller estates created with money from trade were proliferating; thus there 'was a growing diversification of style .... accompanied by a revival of interest in the garden at the expense of the park' (Jacques, 1983:183).

Thomas Hornor's Middleton Hall paintings when compared with the Harcourt memoir reveal that he painted with veracity but in the case of his plan without accuracy. His album of watercolours has memorialised Middleton Hall at the point when this project that was so close to Sir William Paxton's heart, after a quarter of a century of improvement and alteration, had reached its nadir. His eleven legitimate children were each left equal shares in his will In 1824 they sold

the estate, it is not known why, and fanned out with their descendants across the globe.

None of its later owners had the income or interest to devote to it and Middleton Hall and its park gradually declined until its reuse as the National Botanic Garden of Wales in the late 20th century. Hornor's plan and paintings are the only visual record of the estate from Paxton's time and repay examination by revealing that a range of movements in landscape design were successfully deployed at Middleton Hall, the remnants of which are still beautiful and evoke strong emotion in the present day visitor just as it did 200 years ago.

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# Appendices

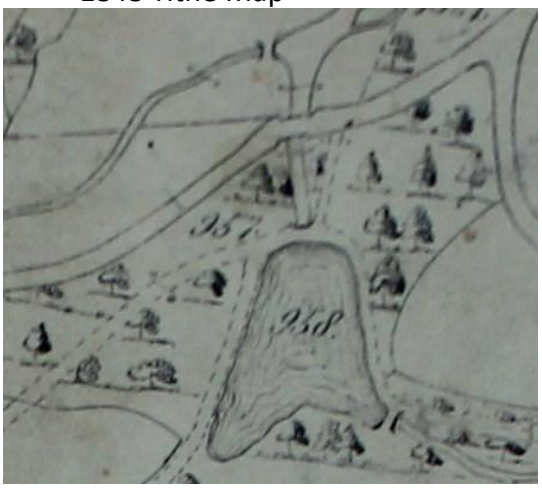
## Appendix 1

## 19th Century maps of Pont Felin-gât

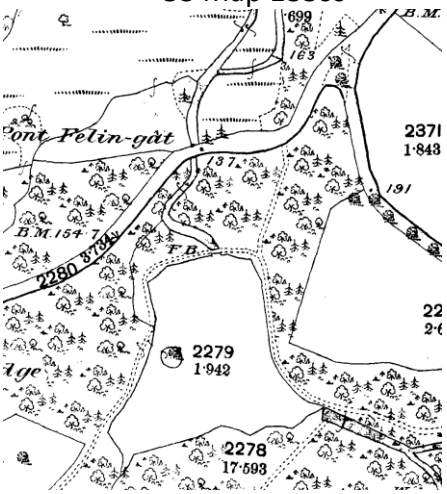
Thomas Hornor plan 1815


Sale Catalogue 1824

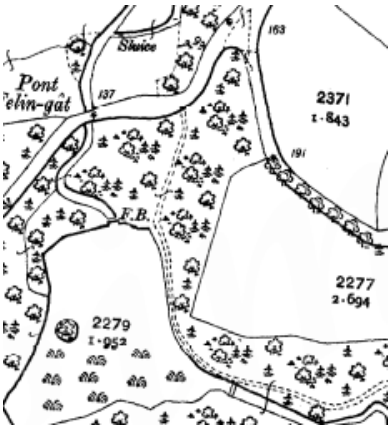
1848 Tithe Map



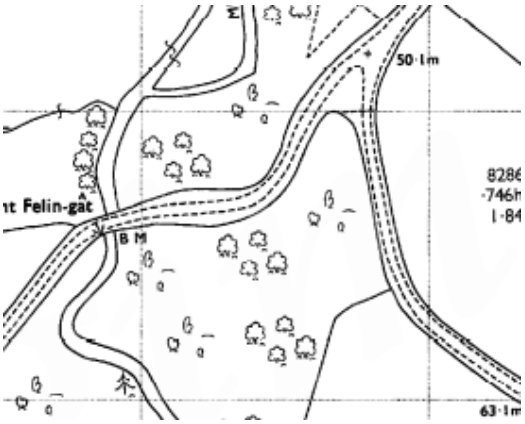
OS Map 1880s




1900s

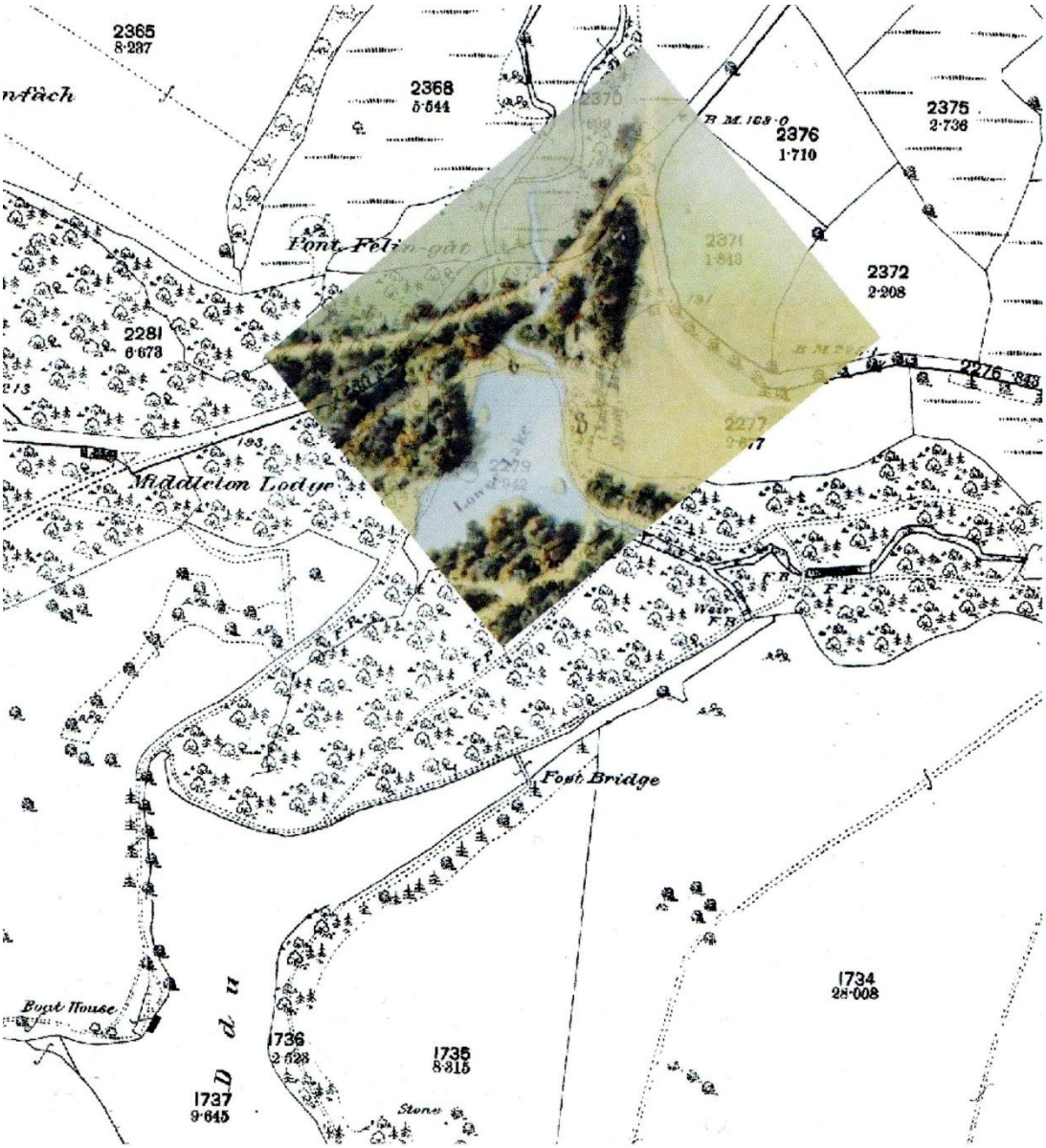



1970s



Appendix 2

GIS Overlay Map – Pont Felin-gât




GIS Overlay Map – a detail of the Pont Felin-gât area from Thomas Hornor's plan of the park at Middleton Hall overlaid onto the 1880s OS map showing that Hornor was able to be accurate in sections. However, when the whole plan is overlaid onto the 1880s OS map the mansion although correct in outline is far from where it should be, it becomes clear that it was probably Hornor's desire to 'picturalise' his maps which resulted in the fact that his surveying was not to scale.

Appendix 3

Present day images from Middleton Hall

View towards Paxton's Tower from the site of Middleton Hall

Nelson's / Paxton's Tower

Base of Pediment from Paxton’s Mansion

Damaged Footbridge at Pont Felin-gât

The Path to the Cascade and Waterfall

The Waterfall

The Cascade

The Chalybeate Spring at Pont Felin-gât.