The Gothic Taste: Humphry Repton and the development of Donington Park
by Hazel Fryer and Anthony Squires

Donington Park is one of the outstanding examples of a late eighteenth-century Gothic country house and landscaped park. The involvement of Humphry Repton in the design of the Hall and Park is unclear. Although he does not appear to have been asked to provide any designs, he did receive a number of payments from Lord Rawdon. After a study of the evolution of the deer park from the twelfth century, Repton’s involvement is discussed in detail, followed by an account of the decline of the Hall and Park to the modern period.

Donington Park is one of Leicestershire’s few country houses built on the grand scale, and one of the outstanding examples of the late eighteenth-century Gothic style. It is also of considerable interest because of the involvement of the celebrated landscape designer Humphry Repton (1752-1818) in the changes made to the Park. Repton made two water-colour views of Donington Park in September 1790. The drawings are important because they show the original design for the house by William Wilkins senior which differ in a number of important respects from the Hall built in 1793. The Hall was to have a considerable influence both locally and nationally. It is evident in the design for Coleorton Hall prepared by George Dance for Sir George Beaumont. Sir Roger Newdigate of Arbury Hall in Warwickshire, a local advocate of the Gothic style, made a visit to Donington and is known to have made a sketch of the principal elevation. At the time he was considering the details for the towers on the north front at Arbury, which it is thought were not completed until after July 1793. It is interesting to speculate how far he may have been influenced by what he saw at Donington. It is also possible that the architect S. P. Cockerell, with whom Repton was collaborating at Sezincote in Gloucestershire in about 1804, was aware of the designs for Donington published in Britton’s Beauties of England and Wales in 1800. Donington Park is the only modern house in the Gothic style to be included in Richardson’s influential New Vitruvius Britannicus. Gothic architecture was a

1 J. Brushe, ‘Wilkins Senior’s original designs for Donington Park as proposed by Repton’, Burlington Magazine, 121 (1979), pp.113-14. Brushe first drew attention to the drawings, which are inserted in what appears to be John Nichols’s personal copy of his History and Antiquities of the County of Leicester, 3.2, opposite p.778, now in the LRO: information of Mr Aubrey Stevenson, Local Studies Librarian, Leicestershire Record Office.
3 Brushe, ‘Wilkins Senior’, as n.1, pp.113-14.
4 G. Richardson, The new Vitruvius Britannicus, consisting of plans and elevations of modern buildings, public and private, erected in Great Britain by the most celebrated architects. Engraved ... from original drawings. 2 vols (1802-1808), 2, plates 31-35. London: the author, sold by J. Taylor, 1808; Brushe, ‘Wilkins Senior’, as n.1, p.113.

1. Sketch of Donington Hall unimproved from the south-east by Humphry Repton, 1790.
(figures 1-4 from John Nichols' personal copy of his *History and Antiquities of the County of Leicester*, published by permission of the Leicestershire Museums, Arts and Records Services)
2. Sketch of Donington Hall from the south-east by Humphry Repton with outside flap lifted to show proposed improvements, 1790.
3. Sketch of Donington Hall unimproved from the south-west by Humphry Repton, 1790.
4. Sketch of Donington Hall from the south-west by Humphry Repton with outer flap lifted to show proposed improvements, 1790.
subject of great interest to Repton and he enjoyed discussing the topic, but Donington Park was different, for here he was to experience at first-hand a major country house built in the Gothic style.

Repton was to make three visits to Donington Park in 1790 and his account book reveals charges totalling 46 guineas: of this figure just £6 6s. was for the two moveable views of the house illustrating the unimproved Donington Hall and the proposed park. The two views, made between 14-16 September 1790, are one of the main sources of documentation for this visit.5 Nevertheless, the role that Repton was to play in the design of the house and its landscape has always been difficult to define. It does not appear that Repton was asked to implement designs and his involvement in the changes to the house and park is unclear. Repton, not known for his reticence, was to be comparatively silent concerning this prestigious project. It can only be a matter of conjecture why Donington Park, such an important architectural commission, was used so infrequently by Repton to illustrate his theories on Gothic architecture in his published works. Of the early commissions on which Repton was to collaborate with Wilkins there are few which prove quite so intriguing as Donington Park. This magnificent building set in a delightful park-land setting appears very 'Reptonian', but whether this is the result of a designed landscape or the grandeur of the ancient park which already existed is a matter of debate.

In April 1790, when Repton paid his first visit, the Park as a result of its remarkable Domesday Woodland must have appeared totally untouched by 'Improvers' hands. When Lord Rawdon inherited Donington Hall in 1789 it was an old fashioned house, set low within its ancient deer park and unchanged for almost fifty years. Designs for improvements were prepared and a new house and the pleasure grounds to the north implemented. The Park appears to have remained unchanged and even today a substantial remnant has been retained at Donington. The south edge of the deer park now borders the internationally known Donington Park race track and it is possible that this impenetrable barrier, noisy though it may be, is protecting the boundary of this ancient Park. In order to understand the changes which occurred at Donington in the eighteenth century it is important to consider the evolution of the deer park.

The history of the park at Donington

The date of the creation of the Park is uncertain, but it may have existed as early as 1102 (the reign of Henry I), when much of the manor was held by the earls of Chester. A date as early as 1102 would make Donington Park the oldest known creation of any Leicestershire deer park.6 The first certain record, however, is dated 1229, when the crown granted John de Lacey, later earl of Lincoln, eleven fallow deer from Sherwood to stock his Park at Donington.7 Evidently the deer thrived and by 1311, when Henry de Lacey died, the Park was well stocked and the herbage and pannage were worth

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20 shillings a year.\textsuperscript{8} For the remainder of the fourteenth century the Park underwent mixed fortunes in the hands of noble owners, four of whom were beheaded for rebelling against the crown. Fifty years later there is no mention of the Park in the Inquisitions Post Mortem of Thomas Holland, earl of Kent, and all the indications suggest a reduction in the value of the manor, most likely as a result of the Black Death.\textsuperscript{9} At the time of the third earl's death in 1400 the Park was contributing less than one-and-a-half percent of the total income of the manor and was barely paying for itself.\textsuperscript{10}

With the death of Thomas of Kent the Park passed to the Crown and at about this time it seems to have become detached from Castle Donington, at least in a manorial sense. Throughout the fifteenth century it was run by stewards who through negligence and self-interest caused the value to remain at a low level. Yet in 1482, only months before his sudden death, Edward IV moved to enlarge his Park at Donington by extending it to inclose certain adjacent lands. By so doing he deprived his tenants of rights of common grazing over the same lands, then called 'shortewoode'.\textsuperscript{11} Thus by the close of the fifteenth century the Park had almost reached its maximum size, and was characteristic of other royal Deer Park. The Park is next noted in 1490 when it was re-stocked with deer by Henry VII.\textsuperscript{12} A survey of the parks of the Honor of Tutbury of 1529 describes Donington Park as 'in compass four miles'. Within the Park were 'many old oaks thin set and few of them any timber but for paling'. The number of deer was given as 700, the keeper of which received 2d. a day.\textsuperscript{13} Sometime in Elizabeth's reign the stewardship of the Park was granted to Thomas Gray of Langley, who had bought the site of Langley Priory at the Dissolution. He used part of the Park for running sheep and was charged with enlarging the Park upon the commons to the 'loss and hindrance' of the tenants.\textsuperscript{14} Gray died in 1565 styling himself 'of Castell Donynyton Parke'. Thereafter Elizabeth granted the custody and keeping of the Park 'with the lodges there ... and custody of the deer' to Sir George Turpin.\textsuperscript{15} The Park was subsequently bought in 1595 by the second earl of Essex, who sold it in the same year to Sir George Hastings of Gopsal (later the fourth earl of Huntingdon), in whose family it was to remain for the following three centuries.

All the available evidence supports the long-held supposition that the early Park was created from part of the extensive Domesday Book Woodland noted for Castle Donington. The site occupied by the Park is an area of strongly rolling land on the border with Derbyshire and contrasts sharply with the flat stretches of the rest of the parish and the landscape on the Derbyshire side of the Trent. The nature of the topography, the probable age of some of the oaks, the richness of the micro-fauna together with comparative studies of Domesday woodlands in Leicestershire, suggest that Donington is a site of great woodland antiquity. The northern line of the earliest

\textsuperscript{8} Calendar of Inquisitions Post Mortem and other analogous documents preserved in Public Record Office, 5, p.156. London: HMSO, 1908.

\textsuperscript{9} Calendar of Inquisitions Post Mortem, as n.8, 10, p 522.


\textsuperscript{11} ibid, as n.10, pp.33-5.


\textsuperscript{13} Melbourne Hall, Derbyshire, Lothian Papers, X94/52/1/2, Survey of the parks within the Honour of Tutbury, 1529.


\textsuperscript{15} Nichols, Leicestershire, as n.6, 3,2, p.775.
pale was laid along Milne Cliffe, a natural boundary which also discouraged illegal entry. The early western edge of the Park was marked by the former county boundary which separated the two manors of Melbourne and Castle Donington. This line was extended by Thomas Gray westwards into Melbourne (to its present boundary) in the reign of Elizabeth. The extension of the Park boundary in the late fifteenth century by Edward IV pushed the Park southward to a line which can only be conjectured, but it seems likely that this additional area, although nominally in the Park, had been given over to the sheep farming. The earliest north-east boundary is more easily determined and would seem to be identical to that shown on the same early map of 1735. The irregular line was clearly very ancient in that it marked the edge of Park Field, one of the great former common fields of Castle Donington.

The original house of Thomas Gray was demolished about 1600 and a new Hall was built in the Park which then extended to over 300 acres. George, the fourth earl of Huntingdon, and his grandson Henry, the fifth earl, did not take up residence but remained at the family’s official home, Ashby Castle. By about 1634 Lord Ferdinando (later the sixth earl) and his wife Lucy had taken up residence. Surprisingly little is known about the Hall and Park for the next one hundred years. During the Civil War Ferdinando attempted to remain politically neutral, though both his father and younger brother, Henry, were royalists, the latter very active in the King’s cause. During the last few weeks of the conflict the Castle at Ashby was besieged, taken and later destroyed by Parliament and the Hastings family were forced to retire to Donington Park. Losses suffered as a result of the conflict brought the family into deep debt, a condition only partially relieved by the sale of lands in 1653. Theophilus, the seventh earl, was also unfortunate in his political choices, being a doubtful supporter of the restored monarch in 1660 but later compromising his political reputation by becoming too committed a supporter of James II. George Hastings, son of the seventh earl by his first marriage, died unmarried and the title, Park and Hall passed in 1705 to his half brother Theophilus. It was he who married the redoubtable Lady Selina Shirley, founder of the Countess of Huntingdon’s Connexion. Lord Rawdon inherited the estate in 1789 when Francis, tenth Earl of Huntingdon, died suddenly while dining with Rawdon, his nephew. The tenth earl, a bachelor, bequeathed to him all of his extensive estates, which included Donington Park and Hall. The only stipulation was that Francis should add the family name and arms of Huntingdon to his own. This he did in 1790 just a few months before the death of his great aunt Selina, the Dowager Countess, who had resided at Donington for nearly fifty years. Francis, the eldest son of Lady Elizabeth Hastings and Baron Rawdon (the first of Earl of Moira), had been his uncle’s favourite nephew and a frequent visitor at Donington. Educated at Harrow and Oxford, he was not to take a degree since at the age of nineteen he joined the army and fought in the American War of Independence. On his uncle’s death the Huntingdon title in effect fell into abeyance. This notwithstanding he embarked upon extensive improvements to the house and pleasure grounds and commissioned designs which resulted in the creation of Donington Park, one of the earliest large houses in the Gothic taste.

16 LRO, Hastings MSS, DG 30/Ma/64/2, A map of the lands in the parish and manor of Castle Donington, 1735.
17 Nichols, Leicestershire, as n.6, 3.2, p.776.
Repton’s work

Repton’s first visit to Donington Park on 13 April 1790 was brief. Returning to London from a visit to Babworth in Nottinghamshire, the estate of John Bridgman Simpson, he called at the Hall, but finding Lord Rawdon from home stayed just two days before continuing his journey to Hare Street. At Babworth William Wilkins senior was asked to provide a design for a greenhouse for Simpson which was bound into the Red Book containing the proposals for the park. The design was not accepted, and although the new park was laid out the greenhouse was never built.

At Donington, where Lord Rawdon had already obtained plans for a new house from at least one other architect, Repton appears to have been more persuasive. In discussion it was agreed that the early designs were unsuitable and Repton asked permission to introduce William Wilkins senior. The meeting was successful and a payment was made to the latter for two views and an elevation on 25 July 1790. It is surprising at a time of considerable financial difficulty that Lord Rawdon, later Marquess of Hastings, decided to undertake such an extensive building. Although Lord Rawdon was to make some changes to the original moveable views presented by Repton these do not appear to have been made with a view to economy.

It is interesting to speculate on Repton’s involvement in the evolution of the design. After his first visit on 13 April 1790, when Lord Rawdon was away from home, Repton did not make a further visit until 17 July. On this particular tour there is a reference in the account book to £21 received in July from the Hon. Edward Foley ‘on account’. It possibly refers to Repton’s visit to Stoke Edith in Herefordshire, but is more likely to have been a payment for the Red Book for the other family property, Prestwood in Staffordshire, which was completed in January 1791. It is to Edward Foley that Repton attributed his introduction to John Nash, but the meeting is likely to have occurred the following year while Repton was preparing the Red Book for Stoke Edith completed in October 1792. This was a busy time for Repton who received several further commissions in July and August 1790. He was also at Rode Hall in Cheshire, where he received £5 5 13s. from Wilbraham Bottle for his recommendations in the form of a Red Book. This considerable activity may be the reason he did not present his two moveable views for the house at Donington until September 1790. Repton often illustrated his proposals with before and after views in the form of flap drawings: with the flap down the view unimproved, but when lifted all the improvements proposed were revealed. The views are of special interest for two reasons: they show William Wilkins senior’s original designs for Donington which differ in a number of respects from the house as built in 1793, in addition these views provide considerable detail of Donington Park Hall before improvement. The two views from the south east and the south west with the flaps unlifted present a modest

21 ibid, as n.20, p.50.
22 Olsen, *Donington Hall*, p.16.
23 Richardson, *New Vitruvius Britannicus*, as n.4, 2, plates 31-35.
24 Norfolk Record Office, Repton MSS, Accounts, as n.5.
25 ibid, as n.5.
26 ibid, as n.5.
27 BL, Add MS 62112, Draft of Humphry Repton’s Memoir, part 2 with additional comments and notes, some dated 1865.
28 Repton’s Red Book for Stoke Park, October 1792: private ownership, Foley Family
29 Norfolk Record Office, Repton MSS, Accounts, as n.5.
house with its appearance very little changed from the modifications introduced by the
ninth earl in the mid eighteenth century. When the flaps are lifted, the proposal is for
an extensive house to be created in the new Gothic taste. The drawings of the house
before improvement are confirmed by contemporary views in Nichols’ *History and
Antiquities of Leicester*. An Enclosure Map of 1778 for Castle Donington indicates a
smaller house with a large kitchen garden to the north with a bowling green and a
series of formal ponds to the south.

In the year 1790, William Wilkins assisted Repton in the improvement of a series
of houses in Nottinghamshire, including Babworth, Grove Hall and Welbeck.
Repton wrote extensively about the proposals for improvements at Welbeck for the
Duke of Portland which included alterations to the entrance front of the house and
re-grading of the grounds to improve its appearance. Repton also proposed that a
pool which interrupted the view of the river beyond should be removed. The Duke
of Portland was Repton’s most important patron and commissioned three Red
Books for Welbeck and also one for Bulstrode. He was consulted by the Duke and
his son over thirteen years and his work is well documented, but this is not the case
with his brief involvement at Donington. The final entry in his Account Book for the
commission records the visit to Donington from 14 to 16 September, when he
presented the ‘Two Moveable Views of the house’ and an account for £31 10s.
Since Repton’s second account book has been lost, it is not known whether this
association continued.

There is considerable detail in *Sketches and Hints on Landscape Gardening*
about Repton’s proposals for Welbeck, but Donington, which presented a much
more interesting subject, is given a far more cursory coverage as ‘a new house,
building from the designs of W. Wilkins, Esq.’. The house could essentially be
described as a classical design in a fancy dress, and there are some similarities with
Downton in Herefordshire the home of Richard Payne Knight. There are also major
differences, not least the asymmetrical plan for Downton. The most significant
departure from the original design at Donington is the addition of the chapel in the
decorated style which adds a little picturesque asymmetry to the design. Repton said
of this technique:

It has been doubted how far a house, externally Gothic, should internally preserve the
same character; and the most ridiculous fancies have been occasionally introduced in
libraries and eating rooms, to make them appear of the same date with the towers and
battlements of a castle, without considering that such rooms are a modern invention,
and, consequently becomes an anachronism; perhaps the only rooms of a house which
can, with propriety, be Gothic are the hall, the chapel, and those long apartments
which lead to the several apartments.
In the notes at the end of the page Repton praises Donington for its sash windows, rather half-hearted commendation for such a superb achievement. It seems unusual that the lavish praise bestowed on the Duke of Portland’s amendments at Welbeck were not matched by more wholehearted acclaim for Donington. William Wilkins’s commission was to continue over a long period of time and Rawdon proved to be a very generous patron.  

All the walls of the present garden should be demolished and the space united to the Pleasure Ground. A Flower Garden, however, should be reserved in the width of it, surrounded by Park Paling painted dark Green, with a Green House & two Hot Houses for tender Exotics.  

In July 1800 an agreement was also signed for making a new pond head. The new lake which Lord Rawdon wished to create on the western side of the house is not indicated on the moveable views and there is no known documentation that it was to a design or in a location proposed by Repton. Whether William Wilkins gave advise concerning the lake is not known, but it does appear that he made proposals for details for the Pleasure Grounds as well as the architectural improvements to the estate. The construction of the lake was to prove troublesome and when it was dug there seems to have been considerable difficulty in getting it to hold water.  

Whether Repton was involved in the location of the Pleasure Grounds to the north of the Hall is a question of debate. Running beside the River Trent with the charming focus of Kings Mills, it seems unlikely that Repton would not have asked to express an opinion on this delightful picturesque scene. It also seems unusual that he was asked to present architectural views and not to present proposals for the landscaping of such a picturesque estate. Improvements at Donington continued for a number of years. The Park was extended to the south and the approach improved. William Wilkins proposals for a new stable block, located adjacent to the house, and approached from the Castle Donington to Kings Mills road to the north, appears to have been completed and designs for picturesque improvements to the chapel at Kings Mills implemented. A plan from a survey completed in 1833 indicates the pool and stable block built adjacent to the house. It also appears to indicate a line of fencing to the deer park which would separate it from the pleasure grounds on a similar line to that indicated in William Wilkins drawing engraved by J. Basire in 1800. What does seem strange is that Repton did not acknowledge more fully such an important example of a building in Gothic taste set in such a delightful picturesque landscape. The details illustrated by J. P. Neale in his engraving of the house in 1822 seem particularly Reptonian in style and include flower beds designed in the style of baskets, a detail often used in his designs.
In *Observations on the Theory and Practice of Landscape Gardening*, Repton seems to condemn as prevalent the taste for that which is called Gothic:

in the neighbourhood of great cities, that we see buildings of every description, from the villa to the pigsty, with little painted arches, or battlements, to look like Gothic; and a Gothic dairy is now become as common an appendage to a place, as were formerly the hermitage, the grotto, or the Chinese pavilion. Why the dairy should be Gothic when the house is not so, I cannot understand, unless it arises from that great source of bad taste, to introduce what is called a pretty thing without any reference to its character, situation, or uses. 45

In his later commissions Repton was to be involved in several sensational buildings in the Gothic taste and was to write extensively about the nature of the style. It is perhaps at Ashridge, in Hertfordshire, one of Repton’s late commissions, that he would have known a particularly fine building in the Gothic Taste. Ashridge, designed by James Wyatt, but completed after his death by Geoffrey Wyatt, was also to present important parallels with Donington, for many of the proposals for the pleasure grounds advocated by Repton in his Red Book were implemented and adapted by Wyatt. It is interesting to compare the improvements at Ashridge with those for Donington one of Repton’s earlier experiences in the Gothic style where he, a landscape designer, appears to have taken the role of architectural innovator. There is, however, no documentation to suggest that William Wilkins may have undertaken a similar role in implementing Repton’s proposals at Donington.

The new Hall

The building of the new Hall and the landscaping of its grounds, the generous hospitality shown to visitors over the years, together with the refurbishment of the second family seat of Loudoun Castle, had reduced the Hastings fortunes to an even more perilous state. When the Marquess died in 1826 his son inherited an estate which, along with the Hall and much of its contents, was heavily mortgaged. George Augustus Rawdon-Hastings, the second Marquess, was in most ways a sharp contrast to his father, lacking among other things the military spirit, the political acumen and the broad sense of vision. He succeeded to the title at the age 18 when he was living at the Hall with his four younger sisters. His chief interest, which developed into a passion, was in foxhunting and, although he carried out a minimum of state duties demanded of him by his rank and status, most of his life was spent leading the field in the Donington area. In the Quorn country he developed a reputation as ‘a right good sportsman’. 46 Between 1835 and 1842 he kept a pack of hounds at the Hall which were housed near Starkeys Bridge in purpose-built kennels, now demolished. In the Park the tree planting along the southern perimeter, which his father had begun, was completed to form the spinneys which were to become known as Coppice Wood, Holly Wood and All Hooks Wood. 47 By the time of his early death in 1844, at the age 35, the plantings of the pleasure grounds between the Hall and the Trent were moving towards maturity. At the same time the family fortunes were moving towards an episode from which they were never to recover.

Reginald, the third Marquess, succeeded to the Hall and estate at the age of 12, but died under mysterious circumstances in Ireland only six years later. His brother, Harry

45 Repton, *Observations*, as n.37, p.255.
47 Map of Donington Park 1836 in private ownership.
Rawdon-Hastings, then aged nine, became the fourth Marquess. During his minority he was absent from the Hall which was left in the hands of tenants. His return saw the playing of cricket on a pitch in front of the Hall, horse racing in the Park and a short mastership of the Quorn Hunt. As part of the improvements to the Hall on the occasion of his coming of age in 1863, a wrought iron conservatory, the mid-Victorian equivalent of the orangery of former years, was added. In spite of all this activity his efforts at fulfilling the role of community leader were only half-hearted since his life was becoming taken over by his desire for success on the turf. Vast sums were spent season after season on buying, training, racing and more disastrously, backing race horses, in what turned out to be a one man contest with ‘The Ring’.48 In the space of five years the family fortunes were in ruins. The Scottish estates were sold and at Donington wines, furniture, paintings, silver and the contents of the library were auctioned to pay debts. When Harry died in 1868 aged 26, only the Hall and Park remained in the family, under the care of his elder sister, Edith Maud. By the end of the century, only a hundred years after the great landscaping had begun, the Hall and Park had entered a slow and steady state of decay from which they would never really recover.

The social fortunes of the family too were on a slow and, in retrospect, an inexorable downward slide. Edith Maud’s husband, Charles Frederick Clifton (later Abney-Hastings), was raised to the peerage in 1870 as Baron Donington, a creation which can be seen as a last flowering of the late Victorian aristocracy. Yet even his fortune proved insufficient to stem the drain of the Hall and its impoverished estates. The efforts of the second and third barons, his two sons, proved equally ineffectual and in 1901 the Leicestershire property was put up for sale. The purchaser was Frederick Gratton, son of Lord Gratton of Stapleford Park, Leicestershire, who in the event did not live at the Hall and made few efforts at improvement. Instead it was maintained by J. G. Shields, the late lord Donington’s land agent, for the purposes of the owner’s occasional visits for sporting and social purposes. During the first World War the Hall and immediate grounds were transformed into a prisoner of war camp for German officers. By this time the building was devoid of virtually all the contents which had once made it such a prime example of the English Country House, although the Park with its herds of deer still retained the essential timelessness of centuries past.49

The year 1929 saw the Hall and Park up for sale again and this time it was bought by J. G. Shields, the land agent, who poured a large proportion of his accumulated wealth into attempting to reverse the decline of the Hall and Park. Parts of the property became in effect a local pleasure ground when open to the public on certain days. In a further attempt to finance the running of the estate moves were made in the early thirties to establish a motor cycle racing track on the land outside the southern boundary of the Park, an area known as ‘Lord Huntingdon’s Inclosures’. Here the topography allowed for the provision of long, straight runs, but also tight bends on a variety of gradients, all through a much wooded landscape. Racing was extended to motor cars and such was the speed of development of the enterprise that the 1938 Grand Prix drew a crowd of more than 50,000. Yet just when the circuit had established an international reputation further developments were abruptly terminated by the outbreak of World War Two. The track was closed, the Hall was requisitioned by the Army and the Park turned into a vehicle storage depot. This grew so large that


49 From Gillies Shields in personal conversation.
at one time it accommodated upwards of 56,000 vehicles, many parked beneath the ancient oaks, competing for space with the deer, the numbers of which rapidly declined.\footnote{50}

The Army’s occupation lasted well beyond the war years, and it is 1956 when Major J. Gillies Shields, grandson and heir of J. G. Shields took over his inheritance of Hall and Park. Since the Army had made little effort to make good the damage they had caused the main effort involved urgent repairs to the Hall, the clearing of the acres of military debris and the securing of the Park’s boundaries. The difficulty of the task, however, did not prevent Major Shields from opening the Hall to refugees from the Hungarian Revolution under the auspices of the Ockenden Venture. Thereafter further improvements included the clearing and restocking of the lake, the conversion of the stables into mews, the re-establishing of the herds of red and fallow deer and the planting of trees. A further event was the re-opening of the motor racing circuit in the early 1970s and the re-establishment of its international reputation.\footnote{51} In spite of his best efforts Major Shields was unable to maintain the Hall and Park and was obliged to offer it for sale. The buyer was British Midland Airways who acquired the Hall and twenty-five acres of its immediate surrounds. Much of the Park with its deer and ancient oaks were retained by Major Shields who manages the area for the future under the Countryside Stewardship Scheme.

Donington Park was one of just two commissions which Humphry Repton undertook in Leicestershire and today is the only example of his work which exists within the county. The Kings mills is a hotel complex and today faces the river Trent and the Picturesque views which Lord Rawdon admired. The Pleasure Grounds, although neglected, still remain and it would be possible to restore the delightful walks and woodland scenes that were the focus to this important landscape. The work of this late eighteenth century designer is often difficult to trace but it might be possible to restore again the delightful landscape that was recreated by the designer and the architect William Wilkins and could again restore this important landscape.

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\footnote{50}{ibid.}

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