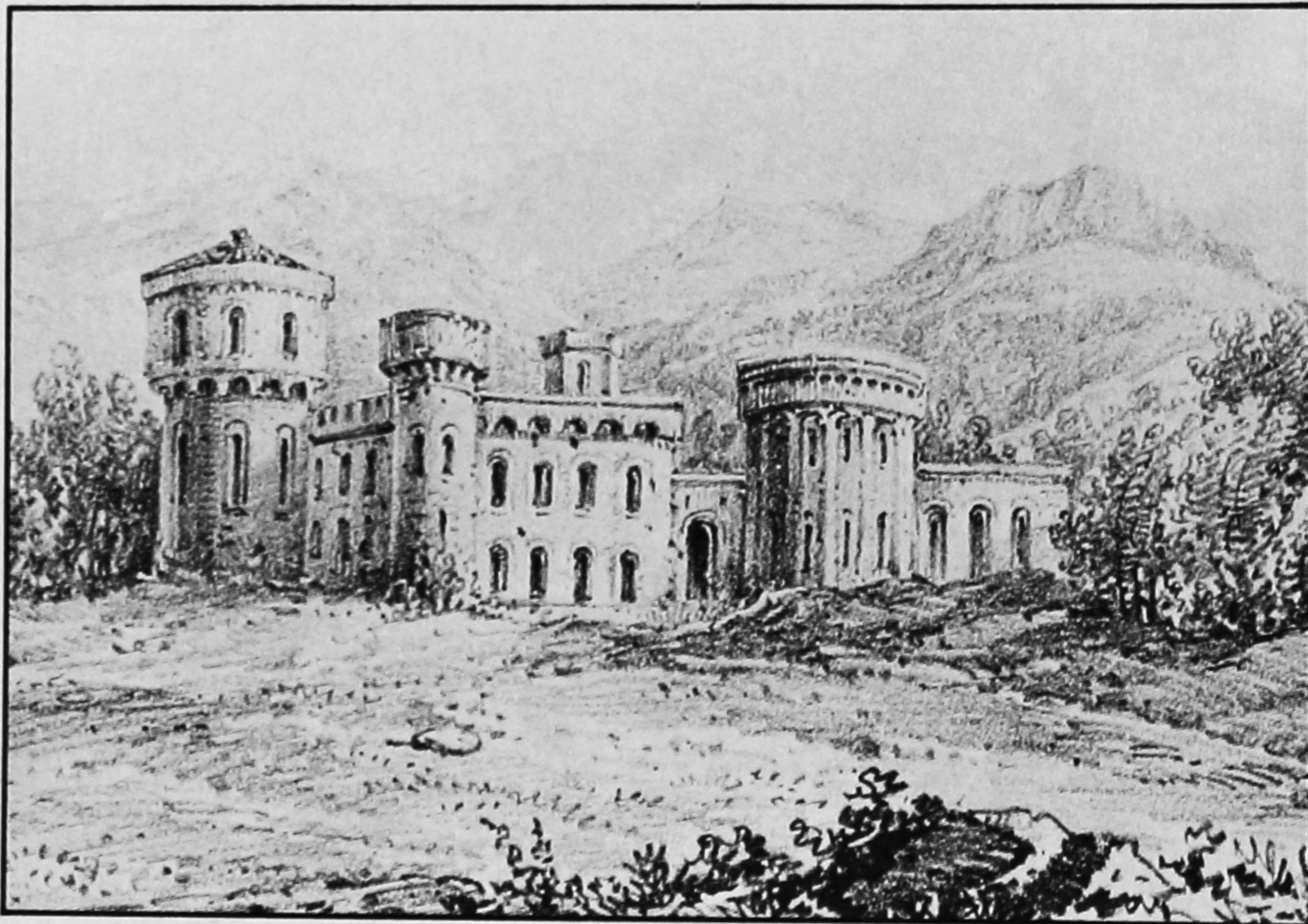


# SCOTTISH ORIGINS OF 'LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE'

By T.H.D. Turner



Carefully inserted into its full and modified setting, this is an example of 'landscape architecture' put forward by Gilbert Laing Meason in his 1828 book. He used it to describe an architectural style based on the great Italian landscape painters. The book was largely forgotten except by Loudon (see opposite page).

IT IS OFTEN STATED THAT FREDERICK LAW OLNSTED AND Calvert Vaux 'founded' the profession of landscape architecture.<sup>1</sup> Less attention is given to the origin of the term 'landscape architecture' or to its travels from Scotland to America, then back to Scotland and, eventually, out to the world at large. The term 'landscape architecture' was in fact 30 years old when it made its first public appearance as a professional title on April 1, 1858. This was the day on which Olmsted and Vaux's Greensward Plan was delivered to the Board of Commissioners of Central Park, New York City. The term then had to wait until the ripe old age of 75 years before it returned to Scotland, its native land, in 1903.

The first published use of the term 'landscape architecture' was in an 1828 book, written by Gilbert Laing Meason entitled *On the Landscape Architecture of the Great Painters of Italy*. Meason was a friend of Sir Walter Scott and accompanied him on a journey through Italy. He lived at Lindertis House near Forfar in Scotland, and rebuilt the house in a square, castellated style. There were extensive gardens, and the house was situated upon a beautiful, richly wooded bank with fine views over Strathmore. This type of architecture was the subject of Meason's book. In it he acknowledges his debt to Richard Payne Knight and recommends an architectural style based on copies of buildings in paintings by Claude, Poussin, Raphael, Veronese and Titian. The book is well illustrated with buildings in landscape settings, and Meason explains that "in selecting examples of landscape architecture from the pictures of Italy we have avoided those in the foreground or in street architecture."<sup>2</sup> Is this book, of which only 150 copies were printed, the source from which Olmsted derived the term? I believe that it is. The term appears to have reached him by the following route.

The great encyclopaedist, John Claudius Loudon (another Scot), read Meason's book and thought that 'landscape architecture' was a splendid idea. He recommended it in his 1833 *Encyclopaedia of Architecture*<sup>3</sup> and used it in the title of his 1840 edition of Repton's works, *The Landscape Gardening and Landscape Architecture of the late Humphrey Repton Esq.*



Andrew Jackson Downing read both these books. The title of his own first book, published in 1841 was *A Treatise on the Theory and Practice of Landscape Gardening, adapted to North America*. By 'adapted' Downing meant 'adapted from Britain', but he was a young man and had not visited Britain. The book was, in fact, 'adapted from J.C. Loudon'. The theoretical content of the book was very closely based on Loudon, and Downing wrote in the Preface, "I take pleasure in acknowledging my obligations and returning thanks to my valued correspondent, J.C. Loudon Esq. FLS of London, the most distinguished gardening author of the age." Section 9 of Downing's book was devoted to 'Landscape or Rural Architecture' and was indirectly under the influence of Meason.

Downing visited England in 1850. He met Calvert Vaux (then aged 26) at the Architectural Association in London and persuaded him to return to America as his assistant. Although Downing died two years later, Vaux acquired a considerable affection for him and christened his son Downing Vaux. It was at Downing's house that Vaux met his future partner, F.L. Olmsted. We can therefore trace a direct line of influence running from the Scotsmen, Meason and Loudon, through Downing to Olmsted and Vaux.

It is highly probable that the term 'landscape architecture' passed down this line, though we cannot be sure of the exact route which it took. Olmsted and Vaux could have obtained the term either from Loudon's *Encyclopaedia* (which Vaux surely read as a student in England), or from Loudon's edition of Repton's works, or direct from Downing. Since we know that Olmsted and Vaux were both acquainted with Repton's works, and that the last of Repton's hand-colored editions was published in 1818, it is probable that their acquaintance with Repton derived from Loudon's edition of *The Landscape Gardening and Landscape Architecture of the late Humphrey Repton Esq.* My guess is that this is the route by which the name 'landscape architecture' reached the new American profession.

### 'Landscape Architecture' Returns to Britain

During the second half of the 19th century 'landscape architect' became well established as a professional title in America. On January 4, 1899 eleven leading landscape architects met together and organized the American Society of Landscape Architects. In 1900 the world's first university course in landscape architecture was established at Harvard University. By this time Meason's use of the term 'landscape architecture' had been forgotten in Britain. Towards the end of the 19th century occasional references to the American profession began to appear in the British press, particularly at the time of the World's Columbian Exposition. To begin with, some resistance was encountered. William Robinson, the famous horticulturist, was quick to stamp on the term, because it seemed to refer to the type of formal garden which he despised.

The first British designer to employ 'landscape architect' as a professional title was a third Scot, Patrick Geddes. He was originally trained as a biologist, but has become celebrated as the most important British theorist in the field of town and country planning, and a major influence on Lewis Mumford. Geddes visited the president of Harvard University in 1899 and was impressed

## *A Scholarly New View Pushes Key Date Back to 1828*



John Claudius Loudon, the most prolific gardening author who ever lived, was responsible for rescuing the term 'landscape architecture' and making it available to Downing and Olmsted in the United States. His 1,278-page *Encyclopedia of Gardening* was published in 1834, when the meaning of 'landscape gardening' was expanding.



by the activities of his son (Charles Eliot) as a landscape architect. The son, who died in 1897, worked with Olmsted and was well known as the creator of the Boston Metropolitan Parks System. Geddes was attracted to the idea of landscape architecture and included a Boston-type parks system in his 1903-4 entry for the Dunfermline Competition, organized by the Carnegie Dunfermline Trust. Geddes described himself as a 'landscape architect' in correspondence with the Trust and in 1907 had some notepaper printed with the heading 'Patrick Geddes and Colleagues, Landscape Architects, Park and Garden Designers, Museum Planners etc'.<sup>5</sup>

It was extremely unfortunate for the British landscape profession that Geddes did not retain the title 'landscape architect'. The imagination and far-sightedness which he possessed in such large measure would have provided a superb starting point for the regeneration of a profession which had almost ceased to exist in Britain. Geddes was also well aware of the close connection between his own work and the 18th-century 'landscape gardeners'. He wrote that "city improvers, like the gardeners from whom they develop, fall into two broadly contrasted schools, which are really, just as in gardening itself, the formal and the naturalistic."<sup>6</sup> Since Geddes very nearly obtained the post of Professor of Botany at Edinburgh University we cannot doubt that he would have imbued the profession with an interest in ecology and conservation at an early date. Sadly, Geddes was always regarded as a maverick by the British establishment and after completing his seminal work, *Cities in Evolution*,<sup>7</sup> in 1914 he sailed for India and remained there until 1922. During these years Geddes was employed by numerous Indian municipalities, including Lucknow, Balrampur and Lahore, to prepare town plans in which an Olmsted-type parks system was often central to his proposals.

Although Geddes was the first British designer to call himself a landscape architect, he did not retain the title. The second designer to take it up was his rival in the Dunfermline competition, T.H. Mawson. Mawson called himself a 'Park and Garden Architect' in his accounts to the Carnegie Dunfermline Trust and a 'Garden Architect' when he joined the Art Workers Guild in 1905.

But when the fourth edition of the *Art and Craft of Garden Making* was published in 1912, Mawson changed his adopted professional title to 'landscape architect'.<sup>8</sup> Mawson had become friendly with Geddes when working on the Dunfermline competition and may have come across the term 'landscape architect' in 1903. However, it appears that it was his 1910 trip to America, which included a visit to the Olmsted office, that induced him to adopt the title. He was impressed, as subsequent generations of British landscape architects have also been impressed, by the quantity and quality of commissions received by his American colleagues. Mawson trained with a firm of landscape contractors as a young man, but being interested in botany and sketching, he soon moved into garden design. He published a beautifully presented book entitled *The Art and Craft of Garden Making* in 1900 and went on to win several competitions for the design of public parks. He published his competition schemes in a 1911 book on *Civic Art*. This book led to a number of landscape architecture/town planning commissions in Canada, including four university campuses before 1914.



Two Scotsmen, Patrick Geddes and Thomas Haydon Mawson, made proposals for Pettengrief Park in Dunfermline, Scotland. Geddes' were in a remarkable, large book of 1904, reprinted as *City Development* in 1973 by Rutgers University Press. Geddes proposed the grand entrance (above) to the park. Both men recommended developing a rugged glen (right). Geddes treated each element of the glen(dene) as a separate ecosystem with its own visual character and name.





However, garden design remained the staple of his practice in England and he commented regretfully that "our private gardens were the work of experts, but our public gardens were mostly the work of amateurs."

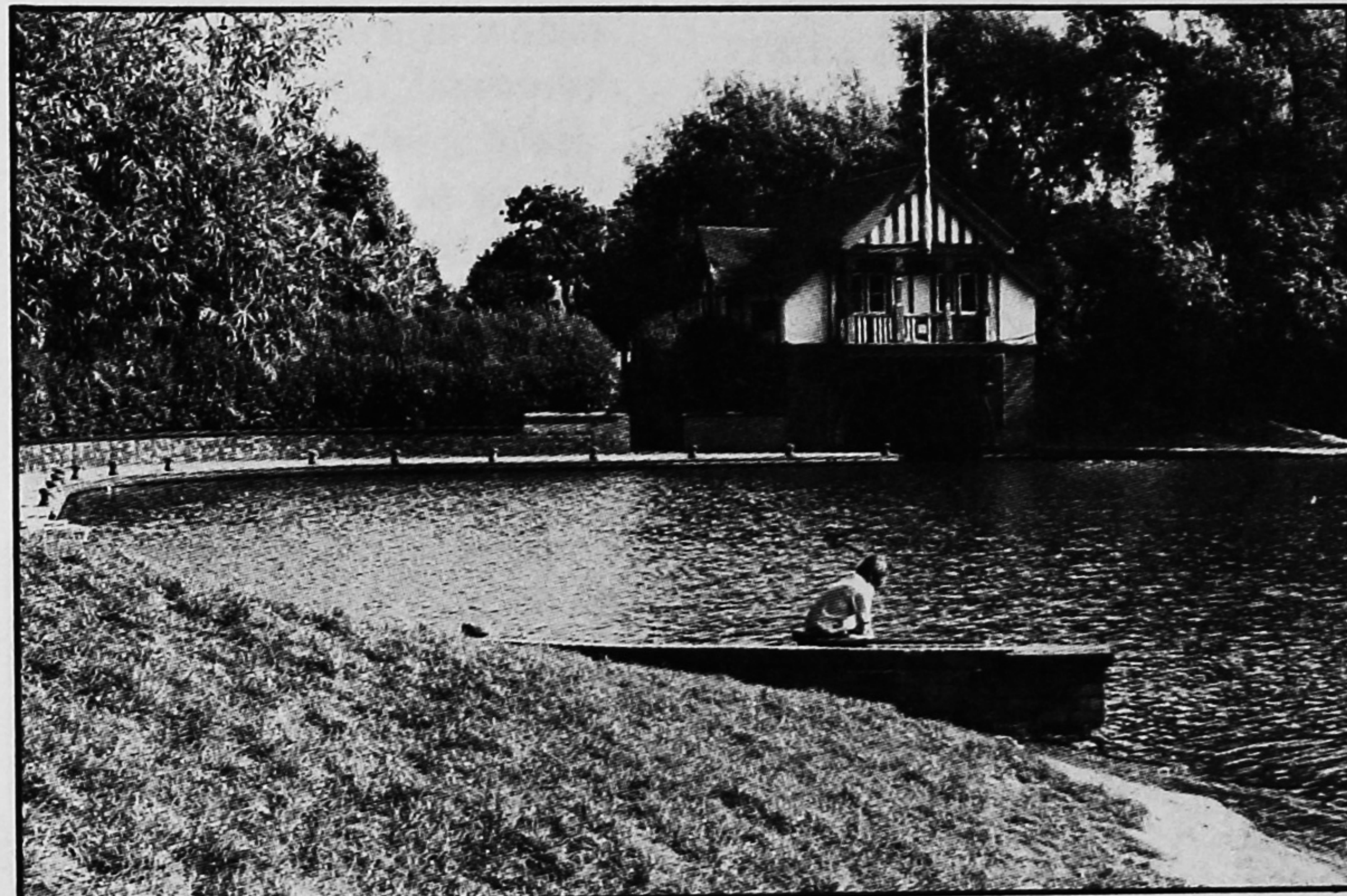
### New Professional Institutions

Geddes and Mawson were the only two landscape architects in the 20-man Provisional Committee which became the Town Planning Institute (TPI) in 1914.<sup>10</sup> Mawson had been one of the first to propose the formation of a new institute and had tried unsuccessfully to have it called the Society of Landscape Architects after its American predecessor. He did not succeed but became a founder member and then a president of the Town Planning Institute. By 1929 Mawson had come to realize that the conception of planning which the TPI upheld was different to that on which he and Geddes had based their professional careers. Instead of confining their activities to particular development projects, planners were concerning themselves with the development of entire cities and regions. While Mawson was preparing physical plans which responded to social and economic conditions, town planners were increasingly concerned with planning the social and economic conditions themselves.

A new English professional body was proposed in 1929 and Mawson, now an old and sick man, was invited to become its first president. He thought that it should play the role that he had once hoped the Town Planning Institute would play. He had been practicing as a landscape architect for 20 years, had tried to establish landscape education in Britain, and was doubtless pleased that the founder members of the new Institute had changed the name of their organization from 'Society of Garden Architects' to 'Institute of Landscape Architects'. Mawson had entitled his autobiography, published in 1927, *The Life and Work of an English Landscape Architect*. After 1929 the title 'landscape architect' became well established in England. In 1948 the International Federation of Landscape Architects was formed at Cambridge in England, and Sir G.A. Jellicoe was elected first president. Since then the use of 'landscape architect' as a professional title spread to other countries and the Federation is now made up of national societies from 41 different countries. The day is almost in sight when every country in the world will have professional landscape architects in Olmsted's sense of the term. But the origin of their professional title must be traced back to the Scotsmen, Gilbert Laing Meason and John Claudius Loudon. □

#### Notes

1. Julius Gy. Fabos et al., *Frederick Law Olmsted, Sr. Founder of Landscape Architecture in America*. (University of Massachusetts Press, 1968).
2. G.L. Meason, *On the Landscape Architecture of the Great Painters of Italy*. (1828).
3. J.C. Loudon, *An Encyclopaedia of Cottage, Farm and Villa Architecture*. (1833). p. 775.
4. A.J. Downing, *A Treatise on the Theory and Practice of Landscape Gardening, adapted to North America*. (1841). Preface.
5. P. Kitchen, *A Most Unsettling Person*. (1975). p. 220.
6. P. Geddes, *City Development*. (1904). p. 97.
7. P. Geddes, *Cities in Evolution*. (1915).
8. T.H. Mawson, *The Art and Craft of Garden Making*. (4 edition, 1912).
9. T.H. Mawson, *The Life and Work of an English Landscape Architect*. (1927). p. 232.
10. G.E. Cherry, *The Evolution of Town Planning*. (1974). p. 57.



**Hanley Park in Stoke-on-Trent by Mawson, Britain's most successful park designer in the early 20th century. He was first president, Institute of Landscape Architects (Britain), modeled after ASLA in the U.S.**