



Hardy Plants and Plantings for Repton and Late Georgian Gardens (1780–1820) Case Study: Pitzhanger Manor

Introduction to the site

Pitzhanger Manor in Ealing was the country home of the architect Sir John Soane between 1800 and 1811. He redesigned the house and 12-hectare estate as a country idyll and an architectural showcase. The London Borough of Ealing now owns both the Manor House and the park, now known as [Walpole Park](#). In 2011, the Council was awarded £2.4 million from the Heritage Lottery Fund to help restore and preserve some of the park's historic features, as well as build new facilities.

Aims of the project

One of the main aims of the project was to recreate the Regency setting of the house, using the style and plant palette of the late Georgian period. The project also sought to protect the two 18th-century cedars, which frame views to and from the manor, by adding planting to deter people from gathering around the trees and compacting the soil around their roots.

Researching Walpole Park

We know that Soane (1753–1837) had a copy of Repton's 1803 *Observations on the Theory and Practice of Landscape Gardening*, one of the few gardening books in his extensive library. However, while Repton is associated with some Soane houses, it was another leading designer of the day, John Haverfield the Younger (1744–1820) of a family of royal gardeners, that Soane turned to for advice on his gardens. There were two principal lines of research:

- Soane's documents and drawings
- Comparison of the Walpole Park design with other Haverfield sites

Sir John Soane's Museum holds a major archive of documents and drawings. It contains terse references to the gardens in Soane's and Mrs Soane's notebooks and accounts, as well as Soane's copious design and presentation drawings showing details of the mixed shrubberies framing the rebuilt manor house and a serpentine shrubbery walk. These were compared with other Soane villa sites with Haverfield connections, as well as informative paintings of Soane's later garden at the Chelsea Hospital where he was Clerk of Works from 1807.



Figure 1

Presentation drawing of the entrance front of Pitzhanger Manor in 1801. It shows shrubberies of contrasting foliage framing Soane's new building and screening the service court on the right and the pre-existing Dance wing on the left. There are small flower beds on the lawn with recognisable hollyhocks. It also shows Mr and Mrs Soane and sons with one of their dogs.

(Image by courtesy of the Sir John Soane's Museum)

Figure 2

Presentation drawing of unexecuted design of the garden elevation dated 14 January 1801, showing characteristic mixed conifer and deciduous shrubberies and informal flower planting.

(Image by courtesy of the Sir John Soane's Museum)

Contextual research

These sources revealed that Soane paid greater attention to the Pitzhanger Manor and Walpole Park landscape than in his other projects. He provided an overview of the disposition and style of planting; however detailed records of planting are scarce and limited to a few notes, tree, shrub and seed orders. Little evidence remained on site beyond a few Soane-period trees. Therefore contextual research was crucial in developing a planting palette.

This involved gathering information from other gardens of the period, such as Brighton Pavilion, Russell Square and the Swiss Garden, both on site and from related archive sources. A major source was Henry Phillips' *Sylva Florifera* (1823) which gives valuable descriptions of the effect to be achieved in ornamental planting and reflected the varied foliage, colours and forms of framing shrubberies and flower beds indicated in the Soane drawings. Other sources included Mark Laird's *The Flowering of the Landscape Garden 1720–1800* (1999), J. C. Loudon's *Encyclopaedia of Gardening* (1827); William S Gilpin's *Practical Hints upon Landscape Gardening* (1832) and Charles McIntosh's *The Practical Gardener vol. II* (1839), as well as other sources to check introduction dates (see also Historic England's research report [Hardy Plants and Plantings for Repton and Late Georgian Gardens \(1780–1820\)](#)).

All the plants, sources and dates were entered in a spreadsheet with recommendations for key plants for different areas to achieve the desired effect.



Figure 3

Garden elevation from Soane's *Plans, Elevations, and Perspective Views of Pitzhanger Manor-House* (1833), Plate VIII, rear view. Together with the accompanying plan, this drawing gave guidance on the location of planting beds.



Planting palettes

There were three main planting palettes:

- The **beds** nearest the building were designed to frame Soane's villa, with loosely graduated mixed shrubberies to about 1.5 metres high, with small coniferous and broadleaf trees and shrubs of contrasting colour and foliage characteristic of the period; evergreens and flowering shrubs; roses and herbaceous plants in small groups including foxgloves, *Oenothera*, *Verbascum* and the favoured hollyhocks and spiky plants such as *Phormium* and iris to give vertical interest; as well as annuals and bulbs. Plants for self seeding included hollyhock, *Aquilegia* and *Nigella*.
- Along the **perimeter shrubbery walk** there was more woody planting with flowering shrubs including dogwoods, *Viburnum*, lilacs, *Laburnum*, *Philadelphus*, *Kalmia*, brooms and gorse; climbers such as *Rosa banksiae* to scramble up evergreens; and woodland plants such as foxglove.
- The redesigned **flower garden** with *Nepeta*, *Agapanthus*, *Astrantia*, *Clematis*, iris, lavender and roses.

As Haverfield was a practical gardener, the project team assumed recent introductions (late 18th/early 19th century) would have been favoured, such as *Nepeta*, peonies, spiky plants such as *Sisyrinchium*, *Phormium*, colourful and relaxed perennials such as *Cosmos*, herbaceous geranium and scabious.

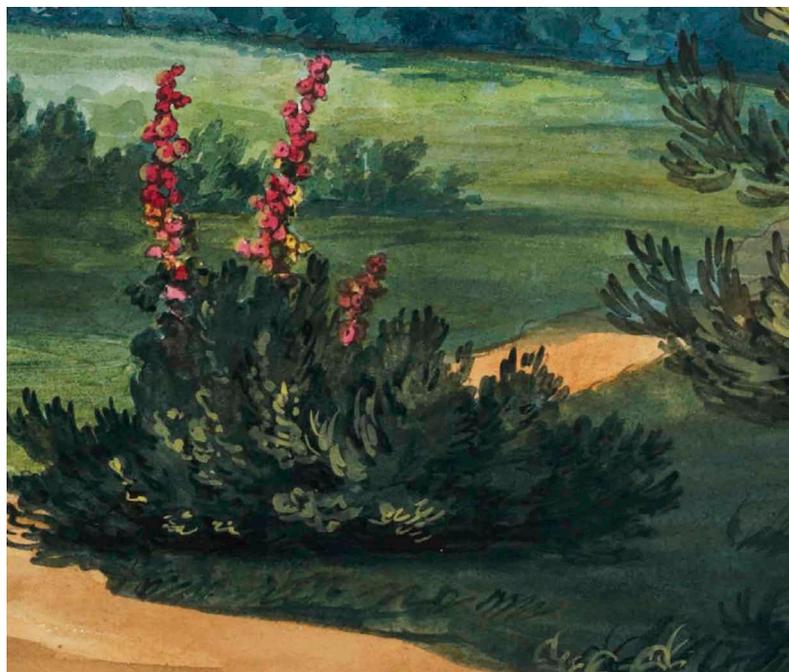


Figure 4

Tall spiky flowers such as hollyhock feature in many Soane presentation paintings.

(Image by courtesy of the Sir John Soane's Museum)

Figure 5

Hollyhocks reintroduced at Walpole Park in planting below a cedar tree.

(©Vanessa Hampton)

Advice for similar projects

This project demonstrated the importance of contextual research in the absence of detailed planting records.

The planting style demanded a flexible and responsive approach in sourcing plants. A variety of suppliers was needed.

Long-term management needs to be underpinned by an understanding of the intended effect of the planting.

Detailed heritage management and maintenance guidance was developed to support the park manager and gardeners in achieving the long-term design aim. It provides a longer list of suitable plants and recommendations for relocation, substitutions and reinforcement where plants had failed due to poor and variable soil conditions, disease or patterns of use. For instance, one distinctive plant in the archive paintings is red hollyhock, but the seed mixes used in the original planting were unsuccessful; they are now well established with many more hundreds propagated from seed. Initially *Lavatera olbia* thrived and provided good volume, shape and colour; they later succumbed to disease but have been successfully reintroduced. Iris and peony have done very well, but Kalmia have struggled. Some 3,000 plants and 14,000 bulbs have been added over the last two years.

Awards

The project was awarded:

- Landscape Institute Award: Winner Heritage & Conservation 2015
- London in Bloom Award Gold Medal 2015
- Civic Voice Design Award 2015

Acknowledgements

This case study was written by [Sarah Couch](#), who wrote the Conservation Management Plan and Heritage Management and Maintenance Guidance and gave advice on historic planting and other aspects of the historic landscape. The landscape architects were [J&L Gibbons](#), and [Land Management Services](#) assisted with planting design.

Images courtesy of the Trustees of Sir John Soane's Museum and Vanessa Hampton.

Further reading

Historic England 2018. [Hardy Plants and Plantings for Repton and Late Georgian Gardens \(1780–1820\)](#).



Pitzhanger Manor Regency planting list – initial planting	
<i>Acanthus mollis</i>	<i>Lavatera olbia</i>
<i>Aconitum napellus</i>	<i>Leucojum aestivum</i>
<i>Ajuga reptans</i>	<i>Myosotis sylvatica</i>
<i>Alcea rosea</i>	<i>Narcissus pseudonarcissus</i>
<i>Anemone nemorosa</i>	<i>Nepeta x faassenii</i>
<i>Aquilegia vulgaris</i>	<i>Nepeta racemosa</i>
<i>Arbutus unedo</i>	<i>Nigella damascena</i>
<i>Astrantia major</i>	<i>Paeonia officinalis</i>
<i>Athyrium filix-femina</i>	<i>Paeonia suffruticosa</i>
<i>Bergenia cordifolia</i>	<i>Philadelphus coronarius</i>
<i>Camelia japonica cvs</i>	<i>Phlox paniculata</i>
<i>Campanula persicifolia</i>	<i>Phormium tenax</i>
<i>Campanula trachelium</i>	<i>Pinus sylvestris</i>
<i>Centranthus ruber</i>	<i>Pittosporum tenuifolium</i>
<i>Clematis integrifolia</i>	<i>Pittosporum tobira</i>
<i>Convallaria majalis</i>	<i>Polystichum setiferum</i>
<i>Cornus mas</i>	<i>Potentilla fruticosa + cvs</i>
<i>Cytisus scoparius</i>	<i>Primula</i>
<i>Daphne odora</i>	<i>Primula veris</i>
<i>Daphne pontica</i>	<i>Pulmonaria angustifolia</i>
<i>Digitalis</i>	<i>Rosa banksiae 'Lady Banks'</i>
<i>Euphorbia characias</i>	<i>Rosa de Meaux</i>
<i>Euonymus europaeus</i>	<i>Rosa du Roi</i>
<i>Fragaria vesca</i>	<i>Rosa 'Maiden's Blush'</i>
<i>Fuchsia magellanica</i>	<i>Rosa 'Marie Louise'</i>
<i>Galanthus nivalis</i>	<i>Rosa Mundi</i>
<i>Geranium endressii</i>	<i>Rosa 'Old Blush'</i>
<i>Geranium ibericum</i>	<i>Rosa Blush Noisette</i>
<i>Geranium macrorrhizum</i>	<i>Rosa Quatre Saisons</i>
<i>Geranium pratense</i>	<i>Rosa rubiginosa</i>
<i>Helleborus foetidus</i>	<i>Rosa Tuscany</i>
<i>Helleborus niger</i>	<i>Rosmarinus officinalis</i>
<i>Hibiscus syriacus</i>	<i>Ruscus aculeatus</i>
<i>Hyacinthoides non-scripta</i>	<i>Salvia officinalis</i>
<i>Hydrangea 'Joseph Banks'</i>	<i>Symphytum caucasicum</i>
<i>Iris foetidissima</i>	<i>Sisyrinchium striatum</i>
<i>Iris germanica</i>	<i>Syringa persica</i>
<i>Iris pallida</i>	<i>Tellima grandiflora</i>
<i>Hemerocallis fulva</i>	<i>Trilium grandiflorum</i>
<i>Jasminum humile</i>	<i>Viburnum tinus</i>
<i>Jasminum officinale</i>	<i>Vinca major/minor</i>
<i>Juniperus communis suecica</i>	<i>Viola odorata</i>
<i>Kalmia latifolia</i>	<i>Yucca filamentosa</i>
<i>Laburnum anagyroides</i>	Seed mix
<i>Lamiastrum galeobdolon</i>	Crocus
<i>Lavandula angustifolia</i>	

Pitzhanger Manor Regency planting list – supplementary planting	
<i>Amalanchier lamarckii</i>	<i>Lychnis coronaria</i>
<i>Aster amellus</i>	<i>Magnolia denudata</i>
<i>Campanula pyramidalis</i>	<i>Oenothera</i>
<i>Cercis siliquastrum</i>	<i>Paeonia lactifolia</i>
<i>Cistus laurifolius</i>	<i>Passiflora caerulea</i>
<i>Clematis recta</i> 'Purpurea'	<i>Pinus cembra</i>
<i>Clematis viticella</i>	<i>Pinus nigra maritima</i>
<i>Cornus alba</i>	<i>Rhus typhina</i>
<i>Cosmos</i>	<i>Ribes sanguineum</i>
<i>Cotinus coggygria</i>	<i>Robinia hispida</i>
<i>Cupressus sempervirens</i>	<i>Robinia pseudocacia</i>
<i>Dahlias</i>	<i>Robinia viscosa</i>
<i>Daphne mezereum</i>	<i>Scabiosa caucasica</i>
<i>Dianthus</i> 'Musgraves pink'	<i>Sorbus aucuparia</i>
<i>Dicentra spectabilis</i>	<i>Stachys byzantina</i>
<i>Euphorbia polychroma</i>	<i>Staphylea pinnata</i>
<i>Helenium autumnale</i>	<i>Syringa vulgaris</i>
<i>Helianthus annuus</i>	<i>Tropaeolum majus, minus</i>
<i>Hydrangea quercifolia</i>	<i>Ulex europaeus</i>
<i>Ilex aquifolium/ variegata</i>	<i>Valeriana officinalis</i>
<i>Kerria japonica</i>	<i>Verbascum phlomoides</i>
<i>Laurus nobilis</i>	<i>Verbena bonariensis</i>
<i>Liatris spicata</i>	<i>Viburnum opulus</i>
<i>Lonicera periclymenum</i>	