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Malcolm Dick and Elaine Mitchell, eds. *Gardens and Green Spaces in the West Midlands since 1700*. Hatfield, Hertfordshire: West Midland Publications, 2018. Pp. 212. £16.99 (paperback).

The history of parks and gardens in Great Britain has been a burgeoning subject area of academic pursuit, and one which has evolved considerably over the past forty or so years. Whereas it initially concentrated primarily on eighteenth-century parks and gardens, the domain of art historians, the field soon expanded to gardens of earlier periods and also to the Victorian era, and from other disciplinary perspectives. Since then, one might argue, explorations have continued to reveal hidden stories, and what is most interesting about the area is that even those who are not interested in gardening can find something of interest in the history of “designed landscapes” (which is how the area is often referred to now). This has included perspectives from a wide range of disciplines, from geography to psychology, from sociology to ecology, from science to economics. More so, other than the making of the home, the garden is the place where the widest range of disciplines converge, and which can be surveyed from such a wide range of views, because so many have engaged with it themselves. Gardens bring memory, cultivate delight, and they are important for our health and well-being. Thus, the number of perspectives is limitless and we have seen continuous streams of new approaches and findings.

The present publication, which looks at gardens and green spaces in one geographical region, the West Midlands, is one of the many exciting publications that have appeared over the past couple of years. This one is unique in the selection of the region, which though blessed with interesting gardens and parks has seen a dearth of research. It assembles a series of papers from a conference held at the University of Birmingham in 2014 which explored landscapes from social, economic, political, and cultural contexts. The investigations of

gardens from such widely different perspectives is presented here as being a new approach, but as suggested in the above paragraph, this is how the discipline has evolved over the past decades. Landscapes literally are mirrors of society and there is plenty more material without having to duplicate existing research, either by looking at places through a different lens, or by looking at landscapes types that continue to be overlooked.

By focusing on the West Midlands, it becomes possible to highlight some of the region's contribution to national development, and the publication commences with an elegant essay by David Whitehead on the origins of the Picturesque movement in Herefordshire, exploring the influence as culminating in the writings and the estates of Uvedale Price and Richard Payne Knight. This is followed by an archaeological perspective on William Shenstone's The Leasowes, a park of national significance, by John Hemmingway. After this we move away from the classical landscape garden to the gardens of industry, to those of industrialists and workers in Coalbrookdale, where the location of coal led to the smelting of iron ore. Here the philanthropic Sabbath Walks provided an opportunity for non-offensive leisure activities, created for the workers by their Quaker mill owners. The essay by Harriet Devlin is the first academic piece of writing that draws attention to these. This is followed by an essay by Elaine Mitchell that investigates a Vauxhall pleasure garden in Duddeston near Birmingham, which for an entrance fee offered "amusements within a landscape setting," (p.77) and was modelled on Vauxhall in London.

An essay by Dianne Barre explores the function of women within the plant nurseries in the region, providing a pioneering study that locates some interesting detail, but in order to get a fuller understanding calls for further research. In an essay on Victorian public parks Katy Layton-Jones addresses another neglected topic. She shows how these were "highly complex environments that often celebrate rather than denounce the materials, scale and socio-economic conditions of the industrial age" (p.122). The next chapter by Maureen Perrie

looks at smaller country estates built in the countryside south of Birmingham, but now engulfed by urban development, some partially remaining. This is familiar process, not only in England. Clare Hickman explores medical care in the countryside, hospitals with therapeutic gardens, a topic in which she is one of the few researchers to do this justice, despite a burgeoning interest evidenced by official policies regarding health and well-being. A final essay by Joe Hawkins looks at archaeological investigation within Hagley Park, one of England's great "lost" gardens.

It is clear from the above that these essays are not themed, except by geographical area, but that they aim to provide a wide range of ways in which landscapes can be studied. The essays are well produced reminiscent in format as a volume of Garden History. It is well illustrated with black and white images and has a section of color photographs, the use of which is always problematic when images are not located within the text, but often inevitable for academic publications such as this. Academic standards have been well maintained, though some mistakes have escaped into the text, but nothing to worry the general reader to whom this publication might also be of interest.

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