

OLD AND NEW OBJECTS IN THE LANDSCAPE GARDEN OF DOWTH DEMESNE (COUNTY MEATH, IRELAND)

VISUALIZING HERITAGE

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This article explores how remains of antiquities and medieval architecture contribute to visualizing heritage in the landscape garden of Dowth Demesne, County Meath, Ireland. The garden was laid out in the 1730s by Nicholas, fifth Viscount Netterville, and comprised passage graves, a henge, a medieval castle, and a church. They are visually linked with the manor, Dowth Hall, by a system of axes. The garden is also connected to the surrounding landscape by vistas of historical sites pivotal for Irish history, e.g. the site of the Battle of the Boyne. The grounds had been in the Nettervilles' possession since the fourteenth century, and it is argued that, in his garden, Nicholas aimed to represent his Old English heritage in response to the socio-political situation of his day.

The landscape garden of Dowth Demesne, County Meath (Fig. 1), is mainly comprised of remains of Neolithic monuments and medieval architecture.¹ Strikingly, the passage grave of Dowth, the Palladian manor of Dowth Hall, and a large henge (Figs. 2-4) form an axis that defines the layout of the garden grounds.² This is not a mere coincidence. The Neolithic monuments had been there first, and, of course, the eighteenth-century manor was added later as part of conscious estate planning. Apparently, prehistoric monuments, or antiquities, as they were called in the eighteenth century, did not exist exclusively in an antiquarian or archaeological context, but also in the context of later appropriation.

1 'Demesne' is a common term in Great Britain and Ireland, and describes "a piece of land attached to a manor and retained by the owner for their own use". *Oxford English Dictionary Online*, 2017, s.v. "demesne".

2 In this article the prehistoric monuments are classified according to the records of the Historic Environment Viewer. Department of Arts Heritage and the Gaeltacht, "Historic Environment Viewer," accessed 22 March 2017, <http://webgis.archaeology.ie/historicenvironment/>.

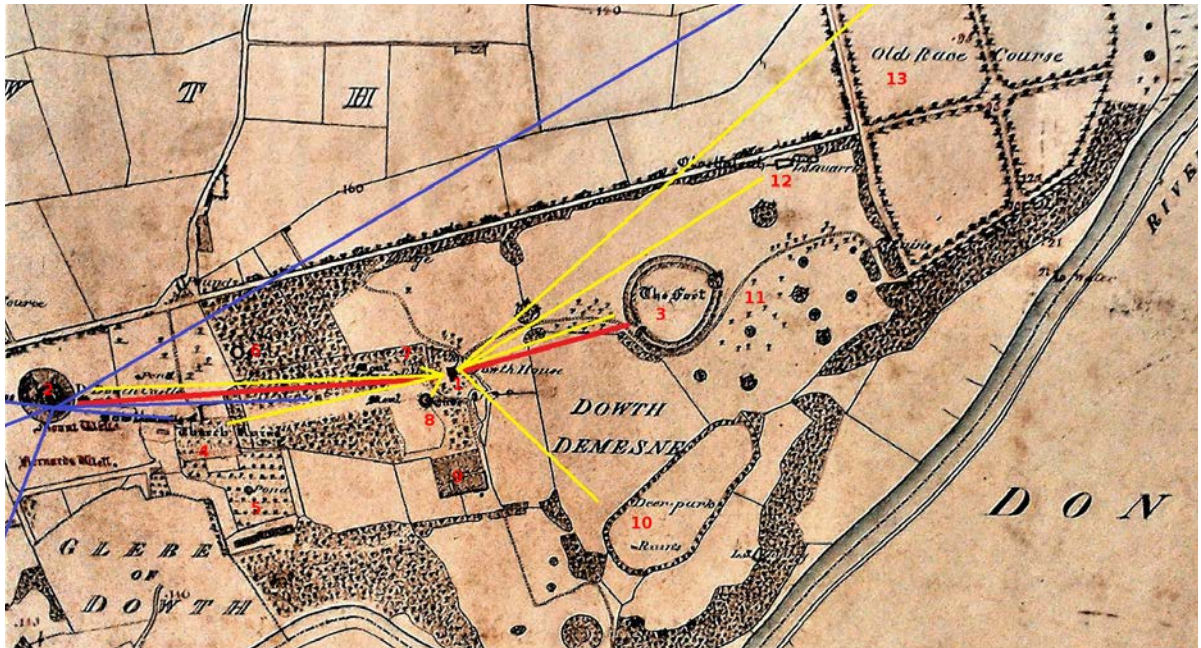


Fig. 1

Map of Douth Demesne, County Meath (by permission of the Director of the National Archives of Ireland, markings by the author): 1 Douth Hall, 2 passage grave of Douth, 3 henge, 4 Douth Castle and Church, 5 fishponds, tea house and sluice (according to Kevin Mulligan), 6 mound, 7 small passage grave, 8 small passage grave, 9 walled garden, 10 deer park, 11 Long Walk, 12 stone circle, 13 racecourse; red: axis passage grave of Douth – Douth Hall – henge, blue: vistas and views from the passage grave of Douth, yellow: vistas and views from Douth Hall
Ordnance Survey Map 1st. Ed. 1836/1837, National Archives of Ireland, Dublin, Ireland.

3 Sam Smiles, *The Image of Antiquity: Ancient Britain and the Romantic Imagination* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), 194-217. See also Richard Hayman, *Riddles in Stone: Myths, Archaeology, and the Ancient Britons* (London: Hambledon Press, 1997), 83-97; David R. Coffin, *The English Garden: Meditation and Memorial* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 149-220.

Indeed, in his study of the illustration of archaeological knowledge, the art historian Sam Smiles explores the incorporation of antiquities in the layouts of eighteenth-century English landscape gardens.³ The mid-1730s mark the starting point for including primitive structures in garden designs, thus permitting a suggestive and imaginative approach to the past.⁴ Smiles further determines that these structures were used for wider associations and political interpretations.⁵ So far, a comparable study of antiquities in Irish landscape gardens of the eighteenth century is a desideratum of research, a gap this article wants to address. In doing so, it builds upon the seminal work of architectural

historian Finola O’Kane. In her research on the history of designed landscapes she examines landscape gardens and landscape in eighteenth-century Ireland, their interrelations and interdependencies, and the ways in which they are perceived by contemporaries.⁶ It also follows architectural historian Kevin Mulligan, who focuses on the built heritage of South Ulster and North Leinster. His analysis of demesnes in County Meath identifies a continuity of designed landscapes from pre-medieval times to the nineteenth century.⁷ With regard to Dowth Demesne, the conscious incorporation of the Neolithic monuments into its garden layout is supported by the site surveys of archaeologists Joseph Fenwick and Clíodhna Ni Lionáin.⁸

4 Smiles, *The Image of Antiquity*, 197.



Fig. 2
Remains of the passage grave of Dowth

Fig 3
Vista from the henge towards Dowth Hall (centre)

Photographs by the author



Fig. 4
Aerial view of the henge
Photograph by Joseph Fenwick, NUI Galway

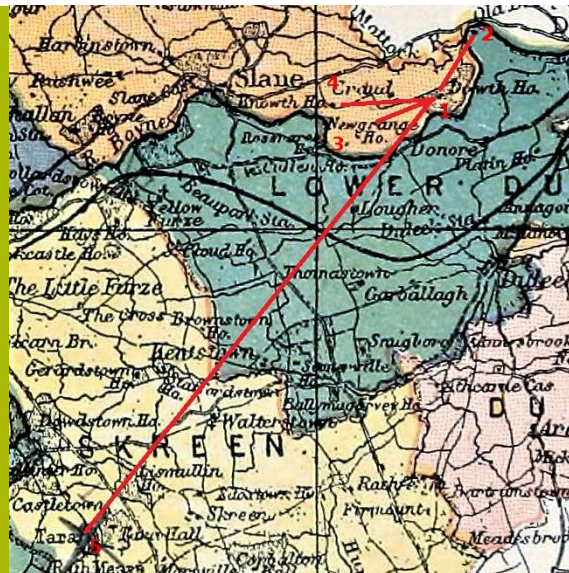
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5 Smiles, *The Image of Antiquity*, 215. On the political interpretation of antiquities in landscape gardens see also Michael Niedermeier, “Archäologie, Genealogie und Politik in der Europäischen Gartenkunst des 18. Jahrhunderts,” in *Angestammte Landschaften, mystische Einweihungsräume und arkadische Liebesgärten: Gartenkunst der Goethezeit* (Kromsdorf: Jonas Verlag, 2017), 289-308.

On this basis, the article analyses and interprets the demesne garden at Dowth and its setting in the surrounding landscape. It argues that the owner of Dowth Demesne, Nicholas, fifth Viscount Netterville, was aware of the historical significance of the architectural remains on his grounds. In his landscape garden, he incorporated a mass of antiquities and connected them visually with contemporaneous architecture, including Dowth Hall itself. But he also constructed vistas towards historical sites surrounding the estate (Fig. 5), e.g. Newgrange and Knowth, and the site of the Battle of the Boyne. It is further proposed that Nicholas, fifth Viscount Netterville, who was of Old English descent (see below) with strong connections to Dowth, aimed to refer to his family’s long lineage in the region, and thus responded to the socio-political situation at the time.

Fig. 5

Map of the area around Dowth Demesne, County Meath (markings by the author): 1 Dowth Demesne, 2 Oldbridge/Boyne Obelisk, 3 Newgrange House, 4 Knowth House, 5 Hill of Tara; red: vistas out of the demesne. Patrick Weston Joyce, Alexander Martin Sullivan, P. D. Nunan, *Atlas and Cyclopaedia of Ireland: Part I: A Comprehensive Delineation of the Thirty-Two Counties* (New York: Murphy and McCarthy, 1905), s.v. “Meath,” accessed 22 March 2017, <https://archive.org/details/atlasyclopediao00joyc>



6 Finola O’Kane, *Landscape Design in Eighteenth-Century Ireland: Mixing Foreign Trees with the Natives* (Cork: Cork University Press, 2004); Finola O’Kane, *Ireland and*

The present argument mainly draws on an analysis of the material findings at Dowth. Unfortunately, Nicholas left few documentary traces.⁹ However, some aspects of the garden layout remain – although the garden has vanished, the antiquities endure. Besides the site itself, there is the Ordnance Survey (OS)

map of 1836-37 (Fig. 1), and because there are no demesne maps of Dowth, this document comes as close as possible to outlining the situation in the eighteenth century. In the period between the creation of the garden and the OS, the outline of the demesne grounds remained about the same – mainly, the planting changed (see below). Contemporaneous records of the garden and its antiquities provide travel accounts by Isaac Butler and Thomas Pownall, and two watercolours by Gabriel Beranger (Figs. 6 and 7).¹⁰ Therefore, although source material is scarce, what does survive demonstrates an awareness of the antiquities at Dowth.

the Picturesque: Design, Landscape Painting and Tourism: 1700-1840 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013); Finola O’Kane, “Ireland: A New Geographical Pastime?,” in *Ireland: Crossroads of Art and Design, 1690-1840*, ed. William Laffan and Toby C. Barnard (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015), 77-97.



Fig. 6

The passage grave of Dowth with the pavilion (by permission of the Royal Irish Academy © RIA)
 Gabriel Beranger
The Moat or Barrow at Dowth
 29.5 x 24cm, Watercolour
 MS 3 C 30/5, Royal Irish Academy,
 Dublin, Ireland

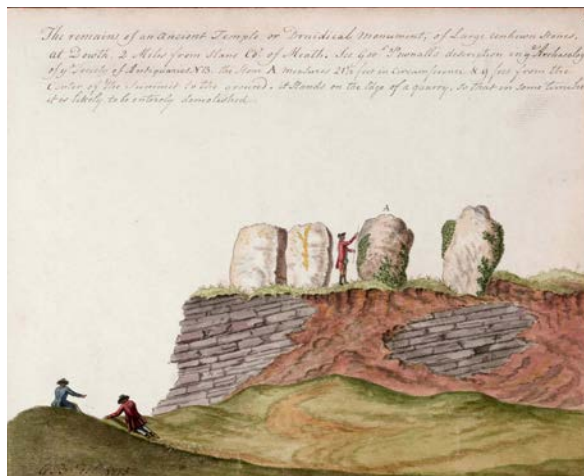


Fig. 7

The stone circle at Cloghalea (by permission of the Royal Irish Academy © RIA)
 Gabriel Beranger
The remains of an ancient Temple or Druidical monument [...] at Dowth
 29.5 x 24cm, Watercolour
 MS 3 C 30/8, Royal Irish Academy,
 Dublin, Ireland

7 Kevin Mulligan, "Aspects of Continuity and Change in the Eighteenth-Century Country House Demesne in Meath," in *Meath History and Society: Interdisciplinary Essays on the History of an Irish County*, ed. Arlene Crampsie, Francis Ludlow, and William Nolan (Dublin: Geography Publications, 2015), 329–70.

8 Joseph P. Fenwick, "The Landscape Features, Follies and Antiquities of Dowth Demesne," *Archaeology Ireland* 27.1 (2013), 26-30. Dr Clíodhna Ní Lionáin, UCD, leads an on-going archaeological project to survey the demesne grounds.

9 Only a few deeds, leases, and the marriage settlement give information on the property at Dowth. Geraldine Stout, *Newgrange and the Bend of the Boyne* (Cork: Cork University Press, 2002), 125–27. There is no material on either an architect or a designer.

10 Isaac Butler, *Journal of an Itinerary through the Counties of Dublin, Meath and Louth in 1744*, n.5953, p.6486, National Library of Ireland; Thomas Pownall, "A Description of the Sepulchral Monument at Newgrange, near Drogheda, in the County of Meath, in Ireland," *Archaeologia* 2 (1773), 236-75; Gabriel Beranger, *A Collection of Drawings, of the Principal Antique Buildings of*

VISUAL RELATIONSHIPS IN THE LANDSCAPE GARDEN OF DOWTH DEMESNE

In order to comprehend the layout of the landscape garden at Dowth Demesne, it is necessary to contextualize the garden within contemporaneous developments in gardening. In contrast to the geometrically laid-out baroque garden, the landscape garden appears to be formed by nature.¹¹ The first landscaped gardens in England, like the garden of Alexander Pope at Twickenham (c. 1718), are still comparably geometric, but the winding layout of the paths provide an experience of opening and closing spaces, resulting in a garden style that is characterized by movement and the perception of space. In Pope's garden, the constituting feature is an axis cutting through the entire layout which creates a long vista towards a pair of urns and an obelisk. According to his friend, Horace Walpole, they do not only function as a visual focus, but also as an associative stimulus.¹² Evoking associations through the design of picturesque scenes and the integration of the architectural elements of the garden – e.g. obelisks, bridges, pavilions, etc. – through visual axes becomes another important feature of landscape gardens.¹³ However, associations are not only evoked when coming upon different vistas while walking, but also when standing at specific, planned viewpoints. Sometimes, these viewpoints can be elevated and emphasized with garden architecture.

Elevated viewpoints have been common since the Renaissance garden. Nevertheless, the importance of vistas into the surrounding countryside can be traced back to Roman Antiquity and the letters of Pliny the Younger. Describing his villas in Tuscany and Laurentum, he explains the significance of views into the landscape surrounding his estates.¹⁴ The Renaissance garden had a literary-based recourse to the Roman gardens through Pliny's rediscovered letters. Besides a continuing reception of Roman and Renaissance authors in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the English landscape garden was influenced by the remains of Renaissance gardens that had been visited on the customary Grand Tour in Italy.¹⁵

The diffusion of ideas about landscape gardening is closely tied to literary discussions and personal contacts. Pope was involved in the development of other gardens in the 1720s and 1730s, e.g. Lord Bathurst's Cirencester, Gloucestershire. Influential landscape gardens were created within a circle of friends, such as that of Richard Temple, first Viscount Cobham's Stowe, Buckinghamshire (c. 1716), and Richard Boyle, third Earl of Burlington's Chiswick, close to London (c. 1715). Because of the ties between England and Ireland, many Irish garden owners had estates in both countries, especially those of New English descent. The third Earl of Burlington, for example, was also the fourth Earl of Cork and had extensive estates in the Counties Kerry, Cork, and Waterford. Robert, first Viscount Molesworth, had estates at Edlington, Yorkshire, and Breckdenston, County Dublin, where he designed an early landscape garden (c. 1690s).¹⁶ Molesworth also invited the garden theorist Stephen Switzer to Ireland.¹⁷ From 1739 onwards, Switzer seemed to have helped develop the landscape garden of John Boyle, fifth Earl of Orrery, at Caledon, County Tyrone.¹⁸ These examples show that landscape gardens in Ireland developed simultaneously to those in England. However, because of its less tamed landscape, Ireland proved to be even better suited to the naturalistic garden style.¹⁹

The landscape garden of Dowth Demesne displays the typical design principles – landscaped grounds, winding walks, and a play of closed and open spaces – and was created by Nicholas, fifth Viscount Netterville, in the 1730s.²⁰ It is situated on rising terrain at a ridge on the northern banks of the River Boyne (Fig. 5), in an area that is important for both contemporaneous and ancient Irish history. The Battle of the Boyne (1690) took place to the east of the estate, at Oldbridge. Furthermore, to the west of the demesne hundreds of megalithic tombs form an ancient graveyard. The biggest are Knowth, Newgrange, and Dowth. Another important site is the Hill of Tara, which is located about fourteen kilometres south-west of Dowth, and was the ritual seat of the High Kings of Ireland until the twelfth century.

Ireland Designed on the Spot and Collected by Gabriel Beranger, 1775, MS 3.C.30, Royal Irish Academy.

11 For a general overview on landscape gardens, see Coffin, *The English Garden*; John D. Hunt, *The Picturesque Garden in Europe* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2002).

12 Hunt, *The Picturesque Garden in Europe*, 15-16.

13 Adrian von Buttlar, *Der Landschaftsgarten: Gartenkunst des Klassizismus und der Romantik*, rev. ed. (Köln: Dumont, 1989), 15-16. This concept is influenced by the idea of associative thought of John Locke. Edward S. Harwood, "Personal Identity and the Eighteenth-Century English Landscape Garden," *Journal of Garden History* 13 (1993), 38.

14 John D. Hunt, *Garden and Grove: The Italian Renaissance Garden in the English Imagination: 1600–1750* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986), 11, 86-89.

15 Hunt, *Garden and Grove*, Part 1, 3-99. For a compendium of sources on the landscape garden see John D. Hunt and Peter Willis, ed. *Genius of the Place: The English Landscape Garden: 1620-1820* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1988).

16 O'Kane, *Landscape Design in*

Eighteenth-Century Ireland, 9-46. On early Irish demesne landscapes, mainly in the traditional formal fashion, see Vandra Costello, *Irish Demesne Landscapes: 1660-1740* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2015).

17 O'Kane, *Landscape Design in Eighteenth-Century Ireland*, 35.

18 Edward Malins, Knight of Glin, *Lost Demesnes: Irish Landscape Gardening: 1660-1845* (London: Barrie and Jenkins, 1976), 82-86. The fifth Earl of Orrery was a cousin of Richard Boyle, third Earl of Burlington, and fourth Earl of Cork. Also important for gardening in Ireland were Dean Jonathan Swift, Reverend Patrick Delany, and Mary Delany (former Mrs Pendarves, née Granville). They formed a circle of friends connected to English gardeners like Switzer and Pope. See Malins et al., *Lost Demesnes*.

The centre of the garden grounds (Fig. 3) is defined by the Palladian manor Dowth Hall. The remains of the passage grave of Dowth (Fig. 2) lie in the western part of the garden and mark the highest point in the area. This was given greater prominence by placing a pavilion on its summit. In 1769, Thomas Pownall recounts that the mound “is now (like the mount [*sic*] at Marlborough) improved into a garden mount [*sic*], planted with trees; and on the top of it is built a modern ornamental temple”.²¹ Beranger’s watercolour (Fig. 6) confirms the ornamental use of the passage grave, although the trees are omitted. In the drawing, four male staffage figures observe the mound and garden building. Two of them sit in the foreground, one apparently sketching the monument, which is partly covered with gorse. Although its size might be exaggerated, the monument was certainly larger than it is today.²² At the end of a spiral walk up the mound, the other two staffage figures stand on the summit and point at the plain cubic pavilion topped with a pointed roof. It was “intended for a Galla [*sic*] room Orchestre”.²³ Further eastwards of the passage grave, the old medieval seat, Dowth Castle and Church, a mound of unspecified definition and two wells can be found (Fig. 8).²⁴ There were also several ornamented fishponds and a tea house (Fig. 1) on top of a sluice through which water cascaded down into the river.²⁵

Fig. 4
Vista and views from the passage grave of Dowth towards Dowth Hall (behind the line of trees), the mound and Dowth Castle and Church
Photograph by the author





Fig. 9

Vistas and views from Dowth Hall towards the two small passage graves, Dowth Castle and Church and the passage grave of Dowth (behind the line of trees)
Photograph by the author

On the terraced lawn in front of the western façade of Dowth Hall, there are two small passage graves (Fig. 9). A walled kitchen garden is located south of the manor. The large henge (Fig. 4) is situated in the eastern part of the landscape garden. It is accompanied by a stone circle near a quarry at Cloghalea (Fig. 7) to the north and a deer park to the south. The layout is completed by a racecourse at the north-eastern end.

The carriage drive towards Dowth Hall (Fig. 1) was carefully staged to display the special features of the demesne.²⁶ The starting point was the northern gate of the racecourse. The carriage followed an allée towards the Boyne, then went along the river and made a northward turn into another short narrow allée. Afterwards the space, and the view, opened up again and the carriage passed the henge along the so-called ‘Long Walk’, following long curves, and approached Dowth Hall, all the while alternating between open and hidden views of the manor. The last sweep towards Dowth Hall included a westward view towards the passage grave. Therefore, the main monuments were passed in the approach, which emphasized their importance in the garden composition.

19 Malins et al., *Lost Demesnes*, 2.

20 The earliest reference of the manor is in the marriage settlement of 1731. Stout, *Newgrange and the Bend of the Boyne*, 125. Based on stylistic comparison, Christine Casey and Alistair Rowan state that Dowth Hall was built later for John, sixth Viscount Netterville, by George Darly in the 1760s (*North Leinster: The Counties of Longford, Louth, Meath and Westmeath* [London: Penguin, 1993], 229). However, the reference in the marriage settlement and the record of rebuilding activities by Isaac Butler in 1744 support the earlier dating. Deeds allow further datings: the carriage drive can be dated around 1734 because of the building of the northern wall of the race course and the Long Walk in that year. Through

building the 'New Lane' and the 'Great Avenue' the western and northern borders of the demesne were pronounced in 1736. Stout, *Newgrange and the Bend of the Boyne*, 126.

21 Pownall, *A Description of the Sepulchral Monument*, 239. Marlborough Castle, Wiltshire, was built for the Earl of Hertford in the 1720s. Pownalls description is the earliest record of the pavilion at Dowth. Since coming of age in 1765 John, sixth Viscount, was the owner of the estate (Nicholas had died in 1750). However, it would make sense that, while redesigning the grounds, Nicholas also erected the pavilion.

22 Poorly executed excavations in the mid-nineteenth century caused the passages inside to collapse. Peter Harbison, "The Royal Irish

While approaching Dowth Hall, the subject of viewing is introduced as another main motif of the garden. The analysis of the garden layout of Dowth Demesne reveals a complex system of visual axes, scenic integrations, and views (Fig. 1). The following reconstruction is based first on my observations at the site itself and second on the OS map of 1836-37. Because of the hundred years between the garden's layout and the survey, changes in the placement of trees must be considered. There are no records of tree plantings in the later eighteenth century. Today, the woodland between the passage grave and Dowth, as marked in the OS map, is reduced to a narrow line of trees. Nevertheless, the passage grave is easily visible from Dowth Hall (Fig. 9) and seems to be surprisingly close. On the map, an axis is cut through the woodland, directing from Dowth Hall towards Dowth Castle and Church, and leaving out the passage grave a little. However, the presence of the passage grave at the site is very dominant. Additionally, Dowth Hall was built on an axis between the large mound and the henge. Therefore, it is fairly likely that the passage grave was visible from Dowth Hall in the 1730s and 1740s. Today, conifers west of the passage grave obstruct the view into the westward landscape (Fig. 10), but they were planted recently.²⁷ Taking these factors into consideration, the following reconstruction is entirely plausible.

Fig. 10

Vistas from the passage grave of Dowth towards Newgrange and Knowth (behind the line of trees)
Photograph by the author



The most obvious visual relationship is the large axis between the passage grave, Dowth Hall, and the henge. This means that there are vistas from Dowth

Hall to the west and east. Westward, there is a long vista to the passage grave (Fig. 9), framed by further shorter views towards the two small passage graves on the lawn in the foreground, and then towards Dowth Castle and Church in the middle ground. To the east of the mansion, there are vistas towards the henge (Fig. 3), the stone circle (Fig. 11), and the deer park (Fig. 12). When the large Boyne Obelisk at Oldbridge was erected in 1736, it was visible from Dowth Hall because of its towering height (Fig. 13). So, another long vista that focused on the Boyne Obelisk outside the estate came into existence. All these vistas and views can be observed from both the ground floor and the first floor of Dowth Hall, and from the outside when standing in front of the eastern or western façades.

Academy's only Archaeological Excavation: Dowth in the Boyne Valley," *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy* C 107 (2007), 205-13.

23 Gabriel Beranger, *Beranger's Rambles through the County of Dublin and Others, 1775*, Description N 8, MS 3.C.31, Royal Irish Academy.

24 According to Dr Ni Lionáin it could be a garden feature instead of an original prehistoric monument.



Fig. 11
Vista from the former site of the stone circle towards Dowth Hall
Photograph by the author



Fig. 12
Vista from Dowth Hall towards the deer park (to the right)
Photograph by the author

25 Mulligan, *Aspects of Continuity and Change*, 350. The end of the cascade was marked by a symmetrical architecture of two vaulted rooms with Palladian windows. *Ibid.*, 368n85. Unfortunately, the author became aware of this information after visiting the site and could not observe the remains in person.

26 I owe the following description to Dr Ni Lionáin.

27 Information provided by Dr Lionáin.

28 Butler, *Journal of an Itinerary*, 41.

The passage grave offers another viewpoint, and the carefully built spiral walk and pavilion suggest its use as such. Beranger's drawing (Fig. 6) also shows the two staffage figures at the moment before starting the process of further visual experience. From the summit, the reverse vista reaches eastward towards Dowth Hall (Fig. 8), which is, in turn, accompanied by a view of Dowth Castle and Church. Contrastingly, this vista evokes a feeling of distance towards Dowth Hall, probably because the viewer is standing on the highest point in the area, and, thus, does not only perceive the grounds of Dowth Demesne but also the surrounding landscape. Consequently, there are long vistas out of the garden. To the north-east, the Boyne Obelisk is visible just above the northern demesne border (Fig. 14). To the west and south-west, there are vistas towards Newgrange and Knowth (Fig. 10), and towards the Hill of Tara (Fig. 15). "[Dowth Demesne] is well situated upon an Eminence which affords [*sic*] it a Delightfull [*sic*] prospect [*sic*]", Isaac Butler recalls quite adequately.²⁸ Delightful prospects within the garden are provided at the tea house settled between the fishponds (Fig. 1). The spot functions like a hinge, visually connecting the important features of the western part of the garden: the view sweeps from the passage grave over to the medieval castle and church and then towards the small passage graves and Dowth Hall. When turning around, one's view into the river valley is directed downwards by the flow of the cascade.

Fig. 13

Boyne Obelisk, County Meath
(National Library of Ireland on The Commons @ Flickr Commons)
Frederick Holland Mares, James Simonton
View of the commemorative obelisk (erected in 1736), prior to 1883
John Fortune Lawrence Collection, National Library of Ireland, Dublin, Ireland



To summarize, there are visual relationships between antiquities, medieval architecture, and contemporaneous architecture within the garden. Furthermore, there are visual relationships towards historic sites surrounding the demesne. These visual connections between the features of the garden, architecture, and landscape interweave different eras from Antiquity to the contemporaneous present – a complex web of time is created and historical layers are applied on the landscape. Architectural structures such as the pavilion, tea house, and Dowth Hall itself highlight the garden’s focus on the visual experience. They provided places for viewing and therefore the opportunity to evoke associations. They also provided places for social interaction, as seen in the drawing of Beranger, which allowed conversations in which one could reflect on the views and their associations.



Fig. 14
Vista from the passage grave of
Dowth towards the Boyne Obelisk
Photograph by the author



Fig. 15
Vista from the passage grave of
Dowth towards the Hill of Tara
Photograph by the author

29 It is unclear when and why exactly they came over to Ireland. Pierce N. Netterville Synnott, *The Netterville Monument and Family: Formerly of Dowth, Co. Meath* (Naas: privately printed, n.d., ca. 1980), 4.

30 Netterville Synnott, *The Netterville Monument and Family*, 4-5. 'Old English' here means 'English born in Ireland' and refers to the settlers and their descendants who arrived with the invasion of Henry II in the latter third of the twelfth century. 'New English' equals 'English born in England' and refers to the settlers and their descendants who came since Henry VIII. 'Gaelic Irish' refers to the native population of Ireland. For reasons of clarity 'Old English' and 'New English' are used in this article. However, it is to be noted that the term 'Old English', which came up at the end of the sixteenth century, was used derogatorily by the New English to distinguish themselves from the descendants of the earlier settlers. The Old English were thought to have become adjusted to Irish conditions, to have lost their "Englishness", and could not be trusted with authority over Ireland. Toby C. Barnard, "Protestantism, Ethnicity and Irish Identities, 1660-1760," in *Protestantism and National Identity: Britain and Ireland: c. 1650-c. 1850*, ed. Tony Claydon and Ian McBride (Cambridge: Cambridge

BACKGROUND OF DOWTH DEMESNE

Further analysis of these visual relationships requires consideration of the contemporary owner Nicholas, fifth Viscount Netterville, and the historical context in which the garden's creation took place. The Netterville family was of Anglo-Norman descent and came to Ireland during the first English settlement of Henry II.²⁹ Since the early 1300s, they had been in possession of Dowth, which held a strategic position as a frontier castle at the border of the newly settled English territories around Dublin, the so-called Pale. The Nettervilles married into important Anglo-Norman and fellow Old English families.³⁰

After the English Reformation, the Nettervilles proved to be ardent Catholics but were, nevertheless, loyal to the English throne.³¹ On 23 March 1622, Nicholas Netterville was made Viscount Netterville of Dowth by King James I.³² He, as well as his successor John, second Viscount Netterville, supported the Irish Catholic Confederation in the 1640s and 1650s.³³ John was deprived of his estates by the Cromwellian government in 1652, but his wife was able to regain one fifth of the estates, including Dowth.³⁴ Nicholas, third Viscount Netterville, was Privy Councillor to James II and died supporting the Catholic king in his struggles against William of Orange. James' defeat in the Battle of the Boyne was pivotal for the socio-political state of eighteenth-century Ireland. From then on, the so-called Protestant Ascendancy, mainly formed by the New English, claimed and maintained political power in Ireland.³⁵ With the Penal Laws, they aimed to dispossess Catholic landowners and to exclude them from holding office. Most of the Gaelic Irish and Old English were Catholic, but the Penal Laws treated them equally notwithstanding the heterogeneity within these groups.³⁶

After the defeat of James II, John, fourth Viscount Netterville, returned to Dowth from his continental education in 1692.³⁷ In 1715, he took the Oath of Allegiance but refused to make the Declaration of converting to the Church of Ireland.

He married Frances, the eldest daughter of Richard Parsons, Earl of Rosse, in 1704.³⁸ His heir was the garden owner Nicholas, fifth Viscount Netterville. Like his father, Nicholas was educated as a Catholic on the continent, at the University of Utrecht. Succeeding to the estate in 1727, Nicholas returned to Ireland in 1728 to take over the property. He converted to the Church of Ireland, probably in order to be eligible to accept his inheritance.³⁹ Despite his conversion, it appears that he continued to act favourably towards his Catholic tenants.⁴⁰ In 1729, Nicholas took his seat in the Irish House of Lords, and in 1732 he held the Masonic office of the Grand Master of the Grand Lodge of Ireland.⁴¹ In that he succeeded his grandfather, the Earl of Rosse, who had been the first Grand Master in the newly established Grand Lodge in 1724.⁴²

Throughout their centuries in Ireland, the Nettervilles proved to be a prominent family, and were proud of their ancient lineage. By the end of the sixteenth century, they had written a colourful and extensive pedigree that included descent from Charlemagne, Scottish early medieval kings, the dukes of Normandy prior to William the Conqueror, the Welsh Princess Nesta, *progenitrix* of the Cambro-Norman FitzGerald dynasty, and, finally, Henry II of England.⁴³ A hundred years later, the Nettervilles lost a considerable amount of their property, but their seat at Dowth remained, and they continued to take pride in their lineage, perhaps even more so, as suggested by John, fourth Viscount Netterville's steadfast hold on Catholicism, or the tradition of naming heirs either Nicholas or John. Apparently, the Nettervilles were a typical Old English family in that they were rooted in the Pale and had a strong tradition of loyalty to the English monarchy.⁴⁴ Initially, the Catholic Old English distinguished themselves from the Catholic Gaelic Irish, but eventually the distinctions between them became less pronounced and they were united against their common opponent, the Protestant New English.⁴⁵ The Old English, especially those of Catholic faith, increasingly adopted the Gaelic past into their identity.⁴⁶ It is unclear to what extent this applies to the Netterville family.

University Press, 1998), 207. See also Nicholas P. Canny, *Making Ireland British: 1580-1650* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 48-49.

31 *Ibid.*, 5.

32 John Lodge and Mervyn Archdall, *The Peerage of Ireland, or, a Genealogical History of the Present Nobility of That Kingdom* (Dublin, 1789), 4:207, accessed 31 October 2017, <https://archive.org/details/peerageofireland04lodg>.

33 Lodge and Archdall, *The Peerage of Ireland*, 4:207-14.

34 Lodge and Archdall, *The Peerage of Ireland*, 4:213-14; George E. Cokayne and Duncan Warrand, *The Complete Peerage of England, Scotland, Ireland, Great Britain, and the United Kingdom: Extant, Extinct, or Dormant*, (London, 1895), 6:10, accessed 31 October 2017, https://openlibrary.org/books/OL14704031M/The_complete_peerage_of_England_Scotland_Ireland_Great_Britain_and_the_United_Kingdom.

35 The term 'Protestant Ascendancy' came into currency at the end of the 1780s. However, Toby Barnard argues that "[s]ince, in conception and practice, the equivalent of an ascendancy did exist before 1787, the use of the term can be justified". Barnard, *Protestantism, Ethnicity and Irish Identities*, 206-07.

36 Clare O'Halloran, *Golden Ages and Barbarous Nations: Antiquarian Debate and Cultural Politics in Ireland: c. 1750-1800* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press), 135.

37 Lodge and Archdall, *The Peerage of Ireland*, 4:216.

38 Cokayne and Warrand, *The Complete Peerage*, 6:10.

39 Stout, *Newgrange and the Bend of the Boyne*, 125; William Jenkins, Francis John Byrne, Gillian Kenny, Catherine Swift, and George Eogan, *Excavations at Knowth 4: Historical Knowth and its Hinterland* (Dublin: Royal Irish Academy, 2008), 186.

40 Jessica Smyth, ed. *Brú Na Bóinne World Heritage Site: Research Framework* (Dublin: The Heritage Council, 2009), 57, accessed 5 December 2017, http://eprints.dkit.ie/333/1/Bru_na_Boinne_Research_Framework.pdf. He also raised his son and heir as a Catholic. Jenkins et al., *Excavations at Knowth 4*, 191.

41 Stout, *Newgrange and the Bend of the Boyne*, 125; Larry Conlon, "The Influence of Freemasonry in Meath and Westmeath in the Eighteenth Century," *Ríocht na Midhe* 9 (1997), 137-38.

42 Conlon, *The Influence of Freemasonry*, 128, 138, 150n1.

Nicholas, fifth Viscount Netterville, was surrounded by Protestant New English neighbours. The Coddington family acquired Oldbridge in 1724, and Knowth came into the possession of Andrew Caldwell in 1729. The owner of Newgrange and Balfeddock was Benjamin Burton of Burton Hall, County Carlow.⁴⁷ This particular neighbourhood relationship became quite close. In 1731, Nicholas married Burton's sister Katherine, and three years later, he leased Newgrange House and 191 acres of land.⁴⁸ This shows how interconnected the socio-political situation of the time had become. Furthermore, Nicholas' conversion and his political and social engagements with the Protestant Ascendancy in Dublin contrast with his family's Catholic Old English heritage, and suggest a variety of identities within Nicholas.

Shortly after taking over Dowth Demesne, Nicholas began redesigning the estate (Fig. 1). The building activities indicate that the earlier estate was less pronounced in its outline, and less ornamented. There were simple fishponds, and probably a walled garden and a deer park.⁴⁹ The definition of the western and northern demesne borders coincided with the erection of the Boyne Obelisk (Fig. 13). This happened at a time when, as a minority in the country, the Protestant Ascendancy had to secure their position. For this purpose, the Ascendancy drew on historical events of the seventeenth century, such as their victory over the Catholics in the Battle of the Boyne.⁵⁰ The commission of the commemorative obelisk was noteworthy as high-profile Protestants were involved.⁵¹ An estimated 45 metres high, the obelisk sent out a powerful message that was well understood and became a marker of identity, so much so that as late as the 1920s it was blown up by patriots in the course of the Irish Civil War.⁵²

It is against this multi-layered background that the landscape garden at Dowth, with its composition of antiquities and medieval ruins, should be interpreted. The following section further explores the visual relationships in this garden in connection to its owner's interest in making his family's heritage visible.



Fig. 16

The passage grave of Newgrange
 (by permission of the Royal Irish
 Academy © RIA)

Gabriel Beranger

*The Great Barrow, moot or mount
 [...]* at Newgrange

29.5 x 24cm, Watercolour

MS 3 C 30/4, Royal Irish Academy,
 Dublin, Ireland

OLD AND NEW OBJECTS AT DOWTH DEMESNE – VISUALIZING HERITAGE

Owing to the absence of sources, there are no records concerning how Nicholas, fifth Viscount Netterville, gained his knowledge about gardening. However, the layout of the landscape garden at Dowth and the complex system of visual relationships from demarcated viewpoints shows understanding of the principles of landscape gardening. Owing to Nicholas' contacts in the House of Lords and the Grand Lodge of Freemasons, it appears likely that he encountered contemporaneous ideas on gardening. Moreover, its creation coincides with the development of other landscape gardens in England and Ireland.

Apart from the abovementioned design principles, the incorporation of antiquities into the garden layout is another characteristic feature of landscape gardens that abounds at Dowth. Irish antiquities had been studied since the seventeenth century. In 1699, for example, Edward Lhyud discovered the passage grave of Newgrange (Fig. 16).⁵³ This discovery coincided with similar

43 Netterville Synnott, *The Netterville Monument and Family*, 6. Tracing the family history back to mythical origins was common. Francis G. James, *Lords of the Ascendancy: The Irish House of Lords and Its Members: 1600-1800* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1995), 101.

44 Canny, *Making Ireland British*, 404, 411.

45 Ibid., 402, 412. Canny points out the wide variety of responses of Old English and Gaelic Irish to the changes brought on by the New English.

46 Colin Kidd, *British Identities Before Nationalism: Ethnicity and Nationhood in the Atlantic World:*

1600-1800 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 147.

47 Stout, *Newgrange and the Bend of the Boyne*, 132; Jenkins et al., *Excavations at Knowth 4*, 185-86.

48 Lodge and Archdall, *The Peerage of Ireland*, 4:217; Jenkins et al., *Excavations at Knowth 4*, 185. On the marital, economic, and political interdependences of the eighteenth-century Irish nobility and gentry, see James, *Lords of the Ascendancy*, 99-130.

49 Because deer parks were a common element of demesne gardens since the late Middle Ages, it is likely that the one at Dowth is also an older feature. See also Costello, *Irish Demesne Landscapes: 1660-1740*, 164-86.

50 Toby C. Barnard, *Irish Protestant Ascents and Descents: 1641-1770* (Dublin: Four Courts, 2004), 136.

51 The first stone was laid by Lionel Sackville, the Duke of Dorset, Lord Lieutenant of the Kingdom of Ireland. Casey and Rowan, *North Leinster*, 446.

52 James Howley, *The Follies and Garden Buildings of Ireland*, rev. ed. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 15.

53 Jenkins et al., *Excavations at Knowth 4*, 251.

antiquarian explorations in England, where, for example, William Stukeley was working at Stonehenge and Avebury.⁵⁴ Surveys on Irish antiquities were conducted throughout the eighteenth century. There were regional studies such as Thomas Wright's explorations of the County of Louth, and endeavours to inventory all Irish antiquities, e.g. by Edward Ledwich and General Charles Vallancey.⁵⁵ The antiquarian debate on Irish history was strongly influenced by the multifaceted Irish socio-political situation.⁵⁶ Furthermore, it was exploited by every party to serve their own interests.⁵⁷

The relationship between antiquarian interests and gardens had its roots in the Renaissance, during which gardens were considered to be apt places to display collections of antiques, and the idea of local antiquities emerged.⁵⁸ The landscape garden developed simultaneously with the antiquarian debate. For example, Stukeley was friends with Switzer.⁵⁹ Conversely, garden owners were frequently acquainted with antiquarians or had antiquarian interests themselves. Additionally, in accordance with evoking associations for visitors to the garden, antiquities were used for expressing further levels of meaning. They allowed a "suggestive and imaginative approach to the past", "to link a place with past events [...]; it was not just the [...] monument by itself that was valued, but the historical colour that was thrown upon its surroundings".⁶⁰

This historical colour was sometimes connected to political interpretations.⁶¹ Linked to Gothic monuments, antiquities were associated with the constitutional liberties of parliament, which were introduced to Britain by the Anglo-Saxon King Alfred. They were referred to by members of the so-called Country Party that opposed the supposedly corrupt politics of the Hanoverian Kings George I and George II, and Prime Minister Robert Walpole. The opposition vested their hopes in Frederick, Prince of Wales, and the Gothic style was thought apt to visualize these opinions.⁶²

One example for this use of antiquities would be the landscape garden

at Wilton, Wiltshire. Its owner Henry Herbert, ninth Earl of Pembroke and supporter of Frederick, had a keen interest in archaeology. In 1719, he commissioned William Stukeley to survey nearby Stonehenge. Pembroke's garden, developed in the 1730s, included a model of the stone circle and a burial mound at the close of a vista.⁶³ In Ireland, with its particular history, the reading of antiquities was somewhat different. There, Gothic ruins and antiquities reminded one of the English invasions and their social, political, and environmental impact.⁶⁴ Antiquities, ruins, and settings were appreciated early-on for the ways in which they could appropriate and reconfigure the environment.⁶⁵

In this context the incorporation and visual integration of ancient monuments and historical sites in the landscape garden of Nicholas, fifth Viscount Netterville at Dowth needs to be interpreted.⁶⁶ The visual axes, scenic integrations, and views construct a system of visual relationships (Fig. 1) that connect the estate to the historically rich site of Dowth and the Boyne valley (Fig. 5). The passage grave, the henge, and the stone circle could evoke associations of a time before the Nettervilles' establishment at Dowth, whereas Dowth Castle and Church, and the deer park, visually reference the family's settlement at the site and its appropriation.⁶⁷ Dowth Hall in turn references the current Netterville at Dowth, Nicholas, fifth Viscount, and ties the other garden features to the contemporaneous period. Thus, a web of different historical periods is constructed to connect Nicholas and his family to the site.

The vistas into the surrounding countryside enhance this visual connection. The vistas towards the Hill of Tara and the passage graves of Newgrange and Knowth evoke similar associations of ancient history, even more so because they are perceived from an ancient monument. A historical layer is visually applied to the landscape, positioning the garden and its owner within the landscape, and within history, to make visual the long connection the Netterville family had to the area. The vista towards Newgrange has an additional level of meaning

54 David B. Haycock, "A Small Journey into the country': William Stukeley and the Formal Landscapes of Stonehenge and Avebury," in *Producing the Past: Aspects of Antiquarian Culture and Practice 1700–1850*, ed. Martin Myrone and Lucy Peltz (Aldershot: Ashgate 1999), 67–82.

55 Thomas Wright, *Louthiana: or an Introduction to the Antiquities of Ireland* (London, 1748); Edward Ledwich, *The Antiquities of Ireland* (Dublin, 1790); Charles Vallancey, *Collectanea de Rebus Hibernicis*, 2nd ed. (Dublin, 1786). Vallancey was also the patron of Beranger's tour in 1775.

56 See O'Halloran, *Golden Ages and Barbarous Nations*.

57 John Waddell, *Foundation Myths: The Beginnings of Irish Archaeology* (Bray: Wordwell, 2005), 57.

58 Hunt, *Garden and Grove*, 24; Luke Morgan, "Anciently Modern and Modernly Ancient: Ruins and Reconstructions in Sixteenth-Century Italian Landscape Design," *Studies in the History of Gardens and Designed Landscapes* 36.4 (2016), 261–71.

59 Tim Richardson, *The Arcadian Friends: Inventing the English Landscape Garden*, 2nd ed. (London: Bantam, 2008), 280.

60 Smiles, *The Image of Antiquity*, 197; Hunt, *The Picturesque Garden in Europe*, 43.

61 Smiles, *The Image of Antiquity*, 215.

62 Buttler, *Der Landschaftsgarten*, 17. Examples of garden architectures would be Alfred's Hall (1721) at Cirencester and the Gothic Temple (1741) at Stowe. *Ibid.*, 36-43.

63 Richardson, *The Arcadian Friends*, 423; Alexandra Walsham, *The Reformation of the Landscape: Religion, Identity and Memory in Early Modern Britain and Ireland* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 321.

64 See Kevin Whelan, "Reading the Ruins: The Presence of Absence in the Irish Landscape," in *Surveying Ireland's Past: Multidisciplinary Essays in Honour of Anngret Simms*, ed. Howard B. Clarke, Jacinta Prunty, and Mark Hennessy (Dublin: Geography Publications, 2004), 297-327.

65 O'Kane, *Ireland and the Picturesque*, 1.

66 Another Irish example of the incorporation of antiquities in a landscape garden includes Caledon and Belvedere Demesne, County Westmeath, created for Robert Rochfort, first Earl of Belvedere since 1740.

in that it visually includes extended (leased) property into the estate grounds. From 1736 on, there were long vistas from the passage grave of Dowth and Dowth Hall towards the Boyne Obelisk. They added another historical layer to the landscape that evokes political associations with the Protestant Ascendancy. Against the background of the associations of the Netterville's long tradition in the area, a connection was made between the Old English landscape garden and the New English surroundings, represented by the obelisk. Thus, the issue of the contemporary socio-political situation, which was in any case generally present in the Irish landscape, was broached and visually included into the landscape garden.

CONCLUSION

This article reconstructs complex visual relationships in the landscape garden of Dowth Demesne and explores the remains of prehistoric and medieval architecture alongside eighteenth-century architecture as visualizations of heritage. Given the tendency of contemporaneous gardening to charge landscape gardens with historic meaning by incorporating antiquities, it can be assumed that in his garden, Nicholas, fifth Viscount Netterville, aimed to represent his family's Old English legacy at Dowth.

It may seem contradictory that Nicholas would refer to his heritage as Old English in his garden when he apparently agreed with and was part of the Protestant Ascendancy, considering his political, economic, and marital involvement. However, in this politically charged environment, there was a complexity of identities that included "often hidden and contrary impulses" depending on various factors such as upbringing, personal experiences at home and abroad, and personal and business contacts.⁶⁸ In that sense, ambiguity in the landscape garden at Dowth is imaginable. To whatever extent Nicholas conformed to the agenda of the Ascendancy, in a socio-political environment that favoured Protestant, non-degenerated English descent, he incorporated

and appropriated antiquities in his garden. By connecting them visually, he applied historical layers to the landscape, and thus evoked associations with his identity as Old English, and the ancient, noble lineage of his family, who had been long-time residents of Dowth.⁶⁹

67 These associations would not necessarily have been historically correct; in fact they should be seen in the context and mind-set of the legendary pedigree of the family.

68 Barnard, *Protestantism, Ethnicity and Irish Identities*, 216.

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