

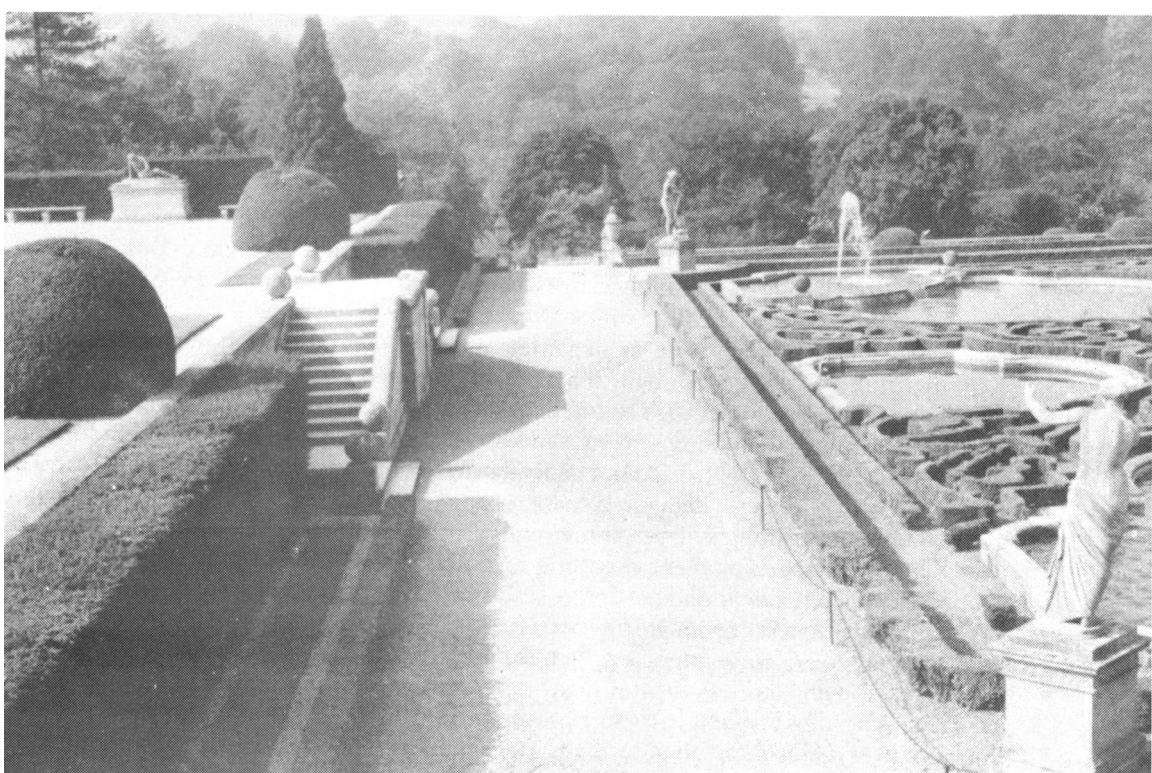


Photograph 2.6 Many of the features and characters of the existing site have been delightfully incorporated into a modern landscape design for a cemetery on Cannock Chase (see text).

between formality and informality which counts—but they are signified by headstones of local grey stone and defined by individual areas of the indigenous heather. A ditch and a sunken angled fence allow uninterrupted views of the Chase while keeping out browsing deer—a modern adaptation in fact of an eighteenth-century device known as a ha-ha. Informal paths curve through the trees, different parts of the site having different

some places succeeded. Civilisation on the one hand was the antithesis of nature on the other, which was seen as barbaric, or profane, to use Yi-Fu Tuan's term (1974). Designs appear to have been generally as unlike nature as possible in form, artificial, a small part of the world symbolically under human control. Formal geometric or architectural designs are clearly the product of human intellect. In Roman times the formal or classical garden style was developed, not to be rediscovered for over a thousand years until the Renaissance. This style was characterised by architectural features such as steps, balustrades, statues, formal pools and geometric layouts (Photograph 3.1). Meanwhile the Hebrews looked back to the lost ideal of the garden of Eden, and soon the rising power of Islam was to develop the idea of the Paradise Garden containing the symbolic elements of fertility—flowers, singing birds, fresh fruits, and above all water, as a contrast to the inhospitable deserts. These concepts figure prominently in such stories as *The Arabian Nights*.

When the Roman Empire disintegrated, the more cultured part of its civilisation gravitated to Byzantium, now Constantinople, in the east. In Western Europe the so-called Dark Ages saw a reversion to a simpler life-style. In the mediaeval period which followed, man was still believed to be superior, under God, to nature. But the human



Photograph 3.1 The twentieth-century Water Gardens at Blenheim Palace in the Italian style show how the formal terracing of slopes may extend architectural influence into the garden.

Man faces nature

In the sunlit plains and hills of northern Italy thinking men were now as likely to study the flight of wild birds as the flight of angels. The Middle Ages had drawn to their close earlier in Italy than in Europe north of the Alps. The gradual rediscovery of classical civilisation, an awakening whose roots lay in the twelfth century, now went hand in hand with a questioning of man's place in nature. Powerful rulers sought where possible to advance their interest by commerce and intrigue, rather than by war. Rich city states, such as Venice, flourished by trade, though backed by force if necessary. Keele (1967) describes the break with traditional attitudes as the use of castles declined, accompanied by the rise of country estates. Rich families no longer felt so constrained to live in restrictive fortifications, but built their famous villas on hillsides where their gardens and grounds could spread without too much concern for the length of perimeter to be defended.

In this way were brought together the elements of the highly successful Villa gardens of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries in Italy. These elements seem to have been diverse. First there were the original compact mediaeval designs which could now be



Photograph 3.3 Water provides a source of deep and probably instinctive satisfaction, especially in hot countries. Here water forms are displayed in abundant variety at the Villa d'Este, Italy.

sums of money by way of ransom. François had enough sensibility to wonder at the works of art and architecture which he saw, and the rich city states of Italy enough cunning to buy him off. A large number of works of art in this way became transported to France, where they can be seen to this day. The transportation of gardens was obviously impractical. So François did the next best thing. He persuaded Italian garden designers such as Vignola to work for him in France.

As before, the character of the site could not be ignored. The location of the court in Northern France did not provide the dramatic slopes which influenced the terracing and fine views of so many of the Italian gardens. The site indeed was rather flat, even swampy. Whether this was in fact the cause or not, the designers did what any military man would try to do who does not have the height of the land in his favour. The grounds in front of the palaces and chateaux were cleared for as far as the eye could see. The visual and psychological effects of height of view were replaced by length of view. Thus was born the idea of the *French vista garden* with its long central axis. Over the cleared ground spread the elements of the formal garden, symmetrically arranged each side of the main axis.

No ground is ever quite flat, something which architects often tend to ignore if they can, but which landscape designers must take into account and indeed develop. The effect on a view of even a few feet of elevation is remarkable. Immediately in front of the building would be a raised terrace, overlooking in turn a greatly enlarged version of the mediaeval knot garden with the ground divided up into parts by low hedges set out on an intricate plan—called literally a *parterre* (Photograph 3.5). Beyond the *parterre* would be yet more formal gardens, blocks of trees, ponds and canals, with everything



Photograph 3.5 The ancient mystery of the maze, inviting exploration and participation, is embodied in the practice of the *parterre*.