

How newspapers can be a great resource for researchers.

As a volunteer member of London Parks & Gardens' research group, I'm often asked where I look for information which might shed light on the history of a park or garden, and what was on the site before it was developed in its current format.

I tell people about local borough archives, the London Metropolitan Archives, The National Archives at Kew, and The British Library as natural starting points, along with the myriad online resources available. (Volunteers signing up with the Research Group are given a copy of the LPG Researchers Guide which lists many of these).

One source which sometimes surprises people is Newspapers; whether national, county or local these can be great sources of information, particularly as the date of publication is a good indicator of the state of a site at that time. To find these the [British Newspaper Archive](#) can be accessed and searched online.

To illustrate how useful this resource can be, when I was researching Fitzroy Farm, Lord Southampton's property in Highgate for London Parks and Garden's 2018 publication '*Repton in London*' I identified four articles or adverts which helped inform the book's content.

Firstly, a brief notice in The Hampshire Chronicle on 11th July 1774 indicated Fitzroy Farm was built and occupied by 1774:

"Last Monday evening the King, Queen & Prince of Mecklenburgh, honoured Mr & Mrs Fitzroy with their company at Fitzroy Farm, Highgate. The elegance and situation of the house and grounds were much admired by their Majesties and His Serene Highness."

Secondly, a description of the garden appeared in an article in The Lincoln, Rutland and Stamford Mercury on 2nd July 1813 as part of a description of a **Fête Champêtre**, meaning ornamental farm or garden designed for parties, hosted by the Earl of Buckinghamshire, at that time the tenant at Fitzroy Farm:

"The north front is approached by a spacious lawn, filled with flowering shrubs and trees, and several gates open to it from Hampstead Lane. On the north lawn, under the shade of trees, a platform was raised for dancing, and refreshments set out in ample order. The south front gives to the eye all that imagination, with respect to rural scenery, can require. The lawn before it is an extensive regular sloping green. On the right and left are alleys of laurel, thickets of roses, bowers of honeysuckle, and a delicious profusion of all the bloom and perfumes of summer."

In addition to this reference there is also mention of:

"A few furlongs beyond the lawn there are several hay-fields and several men and women were seen getting in the harvest.....Over the beautiful vales on the right Hampstead Church is seen emerging from the trees; on the left a dairy and barn

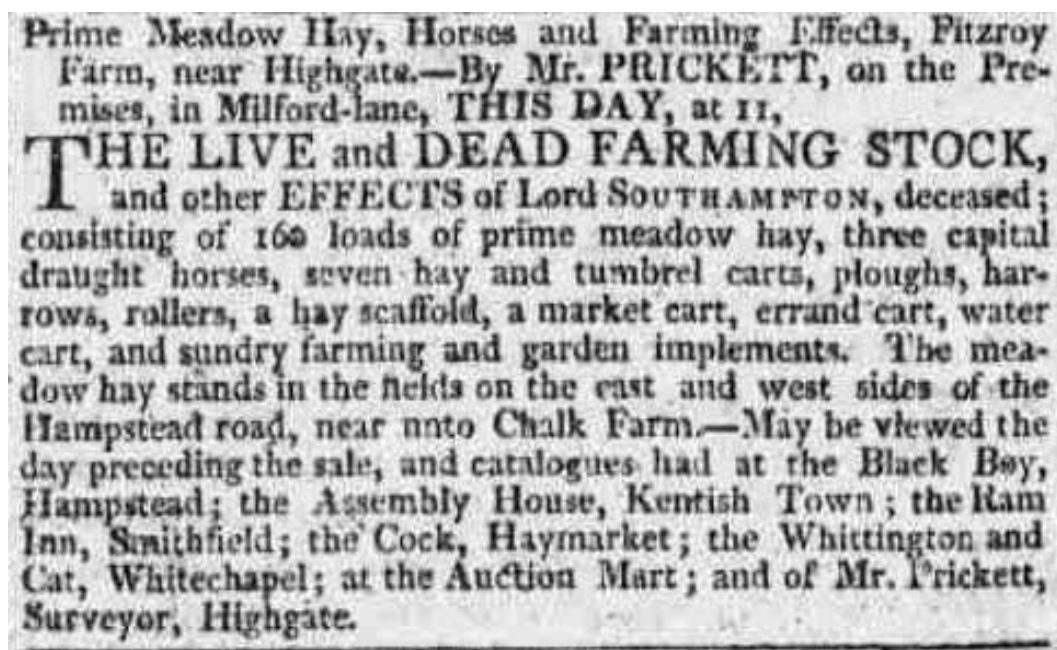
forming on the whole a truly interesting 'coup d'oeil'.....At 6'oclock the distant hay-makers had loaded three wagons and all the hay was off the field."

Whilst not proof Repton designed the garden around the house it is certainly coherent with his view of 'cultivation for profit and that for ornamentation should be kept separate'.

Several references in newspapers were also found providing evidence the original gardens were regarded as a party garden or *ferme ornée* – the first was found in Anna Letitia Barbauld's Memoir:

"Hampstead and Highgate are mutually objects to each other, the road between them is delightfully pleasant, lying alongside Lord Mansfield's fine woods and the Earl of Southampton's ferme ornée."

A newspaper advert in The Morning Chronicle on 12 November 1811 when parts of Fitzroy Farm were put up for sale following Lady Southampton's death revealed further evidence of farming:



Prime Meadow Hay, Horses and Farming Effects, Fitzroy Farm, near Highgate.—By Mr. PRICKETT, on the Premises, in Milford-lane, THIS DAY, at 11,
THE LIVE and DEAD FARMING STOCK,
and other EFFECTS of Lord SOUTHAMPTON, deceased; consisting of 160 loads of prime meadow hay, three capital draught horses, seven hay and tumbrel carts, ploughs, harrows, rollers, a hay scaffold, a market cart, errand cart, water cart, and sundry farming and garden implements. The meadow hay stands in the fields on the east and west sides of the Hampstead road, near unto Chalk Farm.—May be viewed the day preceding the sale, and catalogues had at the Black Boy, Hampstead; the Assembly House, Kentish Town; the Ram Inn, Smithfield; the Cock, Haymarket; the Whittington and Cat, Whitechapel; at the Auction Mart; and of Mr. Prickett, Surveyor, Highgate.

Some 30 years later when the remainder of the estate was sold a further auction notice published in The Leeds Times on 4th July 1840 provides a delightful description of the estate, as viewed by the auctioneer:

THIS GRAND BUILDING PLAN
has therefore began successfully; and as this sale
will include the whole of
LORD SOUTHAMPTON'S PARK,
divided into fifty lots of building ground, approxi-
mating upon those which have been just alluded
to, with one or two acres of each, it cannot be
doubted it will terminate triumphantly.

It must be observed that

THIS MAGNIFICENTLY TIMBERED PARK
is within two miles of the metropolis; and yet
throughout Mr. Robins's great experience, he has
never yet come in contact (even at a remote dis-
tance) with a park so full of natural beauty. There
is so much of hill and dale, with majestic timber
and beautiful waters, every where contending for
the preference; and it must be remembered, by
those who desire to get rich by this adventure,
that the timber, dispersedly placed, gives a charac-
ter, a sort of warranty of success, that builders in
any other situation cannot by possibility claim.
Nature (always kind) has been bountiful here,
inasmuch as

CAEN WOOD, LORD MANSFIELD'S PARK,
adjoining Fitzroy Farm, adds to the splendour of
the scene, and forms one entire and compact Park.
Indeed it may be truly affirmed there has been no
building plan of modern times that can approach
the certainty of success which is here proclaimed.

Interestingly, only one of these articles or adverts was found in a national newspaper, and the other three in county/local papers were relatively far from London; indicating a wide search can bring more results.

Newspapers can provide useful descriptions as well as corroboration of other sources, alongside writings or 'travelogues' such as *The Ambulator*, published in 1811 and described as:

'A pocket companion for the tour of London and its environs, within the circuit of twenty-five miles: descriptive of the objects most remarkable for grandeur, elegance, taste, local beauty, and antiquity, illustrated by anecdotes, historical and biographical and embellished with fourteen elegant engravings and a correct map'

While newspapers are published primarily for their news content, never dismiss the snippets and letter pages. These too can add value to your search, fleshing out the features, characters and events beyond the mundane facts of acreage or plants with gossip and wonder or sometimes scandal too.