

## **Mobilising the Modern Industrial Landscape for Sports and Leisure in the Early 20<sup>th</sup> Century**

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### **Introduction**

My research into the industrial landscape in Britain and North America in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries has identified a movement in landscaping that I have named ‘The Factory Garden Movement’. **[Slide 2]** New types of designed landscapes appeared – cosmetic landscaping for factories, factory pleasure gardens, factory recreation parks and allotment gardens for the children of factory workers.

Industrialists appropriated historical, cultural and metaphorical meanings of designed landscapes in a bid to redefine industry as progressive and responsible. These factory gardens and parks were designed for their potential to improve the health and motivation of employees, and to contribute to a positive corporate image and therefore to profitability. **[Slide 3]** The gardens and recreation grounds became powerful symbols of ideal conditions in industry before the Second World War.

This discussion will focus on the factory recreation parks – those made for sports and other activities. My case studies are **[Slide 4]** the Cadbury Chocolate factory in Bournville, near Birmingham UK and the National Cash Register Company in Dayton, Ohio USA, because these companies became role models for the development of corporate recreation up to the 1960s. **[Slides 4 and 5]** The analysis is linked to sources from sports history and from landscape theory and history to show how landscape architects designed the parks to express a strong sense of place through national landscape identities which added value to the local environment and to their clients’ identity and status.

Company recreation grounds were conceived and designed according to rapidly developing theories of sports and recreation and the kinds of recreation spaces required for successful modern industrial nations.<sup>1</sup> The sophistication of the facilities differed considerably from company to company. **[Slide 6]** Some provided recreation grounds that offered, for example, football, baseball, cricket, hockey, bowls and tennis, while a few gave to their workforce a park of a similar or superior scale and sophistication to those being provided by municipal authorities, including state-of-the-art pavilions, swimming pools, pleasure gardens, boating and picnic areas. **[Slide 7]** In the USA, a small number of companies, including the National Cash Register Company, opened a country park for their employees of the type that was normally only accessible to a social élite on payment of a high subscription.

Company recreation grounds provided leisure opportunities for employees that were especially significant for women and girls for whom opportunities to participate in sports tended to be limited. **[Slide 8]** They also improved the corporate image by mitigating the effects of industry on the environment and people's perception of factories. **[Slide 9]** In English Romanticism, the machine and nature had been in opposition since the first large factories began to 'blight' the landscape. In his book *The Machine in the Garden*, Leo Marx has argued that in American Romanticism the contrast between the machine and nature was 'the great issue' of American culture. Some writers such as Emerson initially defended the machine in the landscape as a technological sublime, (which is present in some landscape art in both nations) but by the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the machine represented the forces working against

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<sup>1</sup> See Conway, H. 'Everyday Landscapes: Public Parks from 1930 to 2000' *Garden History* 28:1 (2000), 117-134 and Neer, D. L. 'Recreation in the Age of Automation' *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 313 (September 1957), 79-82

pastoralism – an onslaught on the American ideal.<sup>2</sup> Landscaping for industry was an attempt to resolve the machine/nature conflict – to create an acceptable co-existence of residential and industrial space in the developing suburbs and to make industrial space more democratic by offering increasing opportunities and freedoms for the workforce without overt surveillance and supervision.

[Slide 10] Outdoor recreation at work was not a new idea, for access to fresh air and exercise had been provided at so-called ‘model’ factories since the early industrial revolutions of both nations, although recreation tended to be compulsory and strictly enforced.<sup>3</sup> A well-designed modern industrial recreation park was designed to evoke a strong sense of place and community to accommodate the demand for an increasing number and variety of voluntary sporting and leisure activities and to enhance the industrial landscape with aesthetic beauty. All these factors were believed to promote industrial stability.

In designing industrial recreation parks, the landscape architects discussed here projected strong messages of national landscape identities. In his book *Fields of Vision: Landscape Imagery and National Identity in England and the United States*, the cultural geographer Stephen Daniels explored national identities presented in landscape art and photography. Daniels argued that the American West and the English landed estate are two of the predominant models for the symbolic landscapes

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<sup>2</sup> Marx L. *The Machine in the Garden: Technology and the Pastoral Ideal in America* New York (New York and Oxford, 1964), p. 263

<sup>3</sup> The term ‘model’ was applied to a factory built and organised to prioritise the welfare of the employees. By the 1910s, the term ‘modern’ was used more often to define this type of factory. See Chance, H. ‘“The Factory in a Garden” Corporate Recreational Landscapes in England and the United States’, Chapter 1 (PhD, The University of Oxford, 2011)

of the two nations.<sup>4</sup> My analysis agrees that these models are each present in my American and English case studies and contributed to a strong sense of place, but I suggest that in addition, they were modelled on landscapes of national identity that were developing from particular conditions of suburbanisation in Britain and America at the time. **[Slide 11]**

The Cadbury Chocolate company and the National Cash Register Company (NCR) both highly successful firms employed professional landscape architects with established reputations in designing public and private landscapes. **[Slide 12]** The Cadbury's Rowheath Park was laid out in the 1920s by a firm of garden architects, Joseph Cheal and Sons, the same firm that had remodelled the grounds adjacent to the factory in the early 1900s and who by 1920, had designed at least 15 public parks across England.<sup>5</sup> **[Slide 13]** The NCR Hills and Dales Park, the Old Barn Club and Old River Park, made between 1906 and 1939, were designed by the Olmsted Brothers, whose father, Frederick Law Olmsted, together with Calvert Vaux, had designed Central Park in New York (date). The Olmsted firm had become the nation's leading landscape architects and they worked extensively in urban planning, designing whole suburban and park systems across the USA.<sup>6</sup> Unlike Cheals, the Olmsteds had extensive experience in landscaping for corporate clients. The landscape designers' role in designing industrial landscapes, was to unify the oppositions of industry and the landscape, the machine and the garden, the conflict between the technological and the pastoral and to create a high status place to project

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<sup>4</sup> Daniels, S. *Fields of Vision. Landscape Imagery and National Identity in England and the United States* (Cambridge, 1993) p. 3

<sup>5</sup> Cheals designed at least fifteen parks between 1885 and 1920, including in Ramsgate, Broadstairs, Margate, Hove, Poole, Leeds, Wrexham, and Acton and Stratford parks in London. See Benton, A.M. *Cheals of Crawley: the Family Firm at Lowfield Nurseries 1860s-1960s* (Uckfield, 2002)

<sup>6</sup> Bender, T. *Towards an Urban Vision* (Baltimore and London, 1982), p. 175

a positive message. Both firms were successful in designing functional spaces that allowed for numerous activities while adopting clear landscape identities that linked past to present – a continuity of time and space - but within a new suburban context.

[Slide 14] Rowheath Park was constructed on about 40 acres of land a quarter of a mile from the factory, which was bisected by a road. The larger part was given over to sports grounds and across the road, they laid out a pleasure park, to cater for more leisurely and horticultural tastes.<sup>7</sup> By the time the new grounds opened in 1924, half of the entire Cadbury workforce of approximately 6,700 was a member of company athletic clubs, which they managed themselves. A typical Saturday saw up to 100 teams and 1000 players on the grounds. The well-designed and functional pavilion and later, the remarkable lido that was added to the site (1937) contributed to the opportunities that were offered by the park.<sup>8</sup>

The more pastoral area to the south that you see here resembled a small country club. Known as the Garden Club, this area was defined by a large pavilion on one side overlooking an ornamental lake. [Slide 15] To satisfy the dancing craze of the period, a dancing lawn was made in front of the pavilion, [Slide 16] embraced by bandstands on each side from where lines of trees that narrowed into an avenue lead the eye towards the water. Beside the Garden Club lawn was an area for more gentle amusements - a putting course, clock golf and croquet.

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<sup>7</sup> 'Garden Club Rowheath Estate' Cadbury Brothers Engineers Office, 27 May 1924, CB. The original Cheal plan, if there was one, appears to be lost.

<sup>8</sup> See Bournville Reporter (August/September 1977), Cadbury archive, Bournville and Beauchampé, S. and Inglis, S. *Played in Birmingham. Charting the Heritage of a City at Play* (Birmingham, 2006), p. 33

The design of the park was based on an eclectic mix of English landscape traditions.

**[Slide 17]** It echoed the English landscape garden style of sweeping swathes of grass and trees that lead the eye towards focal points including the serpentine lake.

However, unlike the typical landscape garden of a landed estate where villages that 'spoil' the view were moved, the view from the pavilion looked towards a 'magnificent panorama' of nearby Frankley Village, which evoked the English village landscape. However, the creation of vistas using axial lines, including the view of the lake through an avenue of trees is suggestive of the more classical tradition of garden design, while the footpaths gathered around the lake, the footbridge and the undulating ground planted with trees, shrubs and flowers is reminiscent of the Repton picturesque. **[Slide 18]** This photograph published in 1936 suggests a reference to one further favourite British gardening style, the Arts and Crafts garden, for an effulgent 'Jekyllesque' herbaceous border can be seen between the pavilion and bandstands, framing the garden club lawn. Chels designed the park to suggest a variety of English landscapes, but miniaturised, removed to the suburbs and organised for function and for aesthetic appeal for a modern suburban society.

By the 1920s, the Cadbury workforce and their families (and local residents who had access to Rowheath and other local parks) had considerably better access to high-quality recreation grounds than many urban or suburban dwellers in the UK.

For reasons of brevity, the discussion of the NCR parks will focus on Old River Park, begun in 1938, which, although considerably larger than Rowheath, was also designed as an combined sports and leisure park.

Old River Park was a redevelopment of existing recreation space on 140 acres of land to the south and south west of the factory. The NCR workforce, and by this time all the citizens of Dayton, already had access to 600 acres of country park further south, but the company decided the employees would benefit from a brand new recreation space and they contributed to both the cost and the construction. **[Slide 19]** Old River was made with very similar objectives to Rowheath Park, to provide the best and most up-to-date facilities that private money could buy for a workforce that already had a reputation for having some of the best leisure and recreation facilities in the nation. The difference between Rowheath and Old River though was in the scale, topography, variety, sophistication and sense of exclusiveness, which would have astonished observers of industrial welfare from other nations.

**[Slide 20]** Unlike at Rowheath, the sporting functions were ingeniously integrated into the design. The space was divided into five parts but it was spatially unified by an oval lagoon, which contributed fluidity and informality to this varied landscape. Closest to the factory was a parking area, covered gymnasium and a new school, a ball field for league games with grandstand and bleacher to accommodate 6000 people and a practice ball field. Beyond this lay an athletic field for men and boys, and a clubhouse. A meadow for girls and young children and hockey pitches and archery ranges covered most of the large island formed by the lagoon. The lagoon was overlooked by a concert pavilion for outdoor band concerts, pageants, moving pictures and other forms of entertainment and on the opposite side lay another sports pavilion, a wading pool for children, sand courts, a shelter and 'comfort station'. Canoes and other boats were available for hire and boaters could enjoy the concerts from the water. On the island and around the lagoon were groves and shelters for

picnics and barbeques. On the north side, a lake, separated from the lagoon by an island reached by footbridges, offered another space for walking or picnicking. A cascade tumbled beneath one of the bridges.<sup>9</sup> The lake was removed in a later iteration of the plan and replaced by a swimming pool with enough space 600 people.

The Olmsted Brothers indulged the far reaches of their imaginations and ideals in what a park should be, using some of the best ideas from American park designs to date that made allusions to a number of American landscape ideals. The most exciting features, those that most created a simulated wilderness experience, were the meandering lagoon for boating and fishing, [Slide 21] and the cascade to add drama, variety and naturalism to the design. Lagoons had become a feature of American park designs since Frederick Law the elder included one in his design for South Park Chicago (1871), fed by Lake Michigan and the entire concept for the design for the Columbian World's Exposition of 1893 was based on number of interconnected lagoons that formed a central island to provide some peace and recuperation for visitors. The presence of a 'rugged' lagoon was suggestive of the American landscape, for example the wetlands of Illinois and Wisconsin,<sup>10</sup> but they were not only romantic features because they also functioned as a solution to drainage.

The lagoon especially gave the park a particularly North American flavour, and it is unlike an English park in other respects. There are no flower borders or formal areas and although flowers were by no means excluded from parks in America, the

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<sup>9</sup> Preliminary plan of Old River Park, File no. 280-106, Plan 183 Frederick Law Olmsted, National Historic Site, Boston, MA, and Olmsted Brothers 'Descriptive Memorandum to accompany Plan no. 183', December 28 1937, Reel 257, Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Olmsted Associates Records, Washington DC and Plan of Old River Park, , 00280 - 280z4-pt1, Frederick Law Olmsted, National Historic Site, Boston, MA

<sup>10</sup> Sniderman Bachrach, J. *The City in a Garden: a Photographic History of Chicago Parks* (Harrisonburg and Santa Fe, 2001), p. 17



aesthetic of wide open spaces interrupted with trees and shrubs in naturalistic groupings is a more direct reference to the American pastoral landscape that features in so much American literature.<sup>11</sup> For some, an American style of gardening became a source of national pride and identity. Wilhelm Miller in his book *What England can Teach us about Gardening* published in 1911 concluded, [When Americans stop imitating the English], ‘our country will have found itself.’<sup>12</sup>

## **Conclusion**

It is commonly said that modernist architecture and landscape became metaphors for the modern body – clean, vital, efficient, healthy, rational, moral – and that like the body, buildings should function efficiently like a machine. **[Slide 22]** The parks discussed here, were modern parks in that they served the more leisured societies of modern industrial nations in a rational way. Although the parks were subject to regulations, they provided a variety of free or inexpensive facilities and opportunities that were easily accessible.

However, they were not functionalist landscapes, for as well as providing efficient spaces for organised sports, they were designed to provide a refuge from the daily rituals and routines of modern life, spaces to dream, to suspend time, to wander, as long as the rules were followed. **[Slide 23.]** The British workers could have almost imagined they were walking through a timeless English landscape and the Americans pretended they were pioneers in the wilderness or farmers in the pasture, but all are

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<sup>11</sup> Marx, *The Machine in the Garden*

<sup>12</sup> (London), p. 343

safe in the suburb.<sup>13</sup> These landscapes were not ‘modernist’ in style, but they suggested a fundamental change in the relationship between the garden and the machine that made them into landscapes that expressed a modern industrial outlook. The Cadburys at Bournville and John Patterson and his successors at the NCR created a sense of place through their factory parks that symbolically combined technology, the natural and the pastoral so that nature and the machine became compatible.

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<sup>13</sup> Simon Schama who lives in the US has described his own suburb, close to the hills and forests, but within reach of the metropolis as ‘this suburban wilderness’. Schama, S. *Landscape and Memory* (London, 1995), 577