

CHAPTER 9

The Greenings of Brentford End, Royal Gardeners

Val Bott¹

Thomas Greening senior (1684–1757) and his family owned a significant nursery at Brentford End, Isleworth, in the old county of Middlesex, over the course of the eighteenth century. He had four sons: Thomas junior, Robert, John, and Richard – who were all involved in the business of gardening and garden designing at the highest level, as was Thomas Greening junior’s son, Henry Thomas. Robert, the second son, was a near contemporary of Lancelot Brown, being no more than a couple of years older than him, and so provides a useful comparator to Brown’s career. In fact, several members of the family were predecessors of Brown as garden designers, winning a number of royal and aristocratic contracts. The award of royal contracts recognised their expertise and helped them to build an impressive reputation as gardeners, nurserymen, and horticulturalists. Individual family members brought different skills and specialisms to the business, ranging from the cultivation of high-status fruits to the oversight of substantial landscaping schemes, including landscape design and estate management.

Historians frequently mention the Greenings, but often confuse the brothers and the different generations.² This chapter sets out, for the first time, a detailed multi-generational history of the Greenings family in order to clarify who was who and to demonstrate with clarity just how important they were as a dynasty of gardeners in the time of Brown. That so little has hitherto been written about them remains surprising since they were such significant predecessors of Brown and were his main competitors as he established himself in the 1750s. By exploring the family business and connections in detail, this chapter not only delineates one of the most influential families involved in the eighteenth-century garden trade but also provides a rich context and backdrop against which we can better understand the career and aspirations of Brown.

The Greenings’ Nursery

The nursery garden, which was at the heart of the gardening business of the Greening family, lay at Brentford End in Isleworth parish, in what is now west London (Figure 9.1). It stood on the north side of the main route

¹ Val Bott wishes to thank Paige Johnson, who generously shared her research into the Greenings undertaken for her Bristol University MA in Garden History in 2007.

² A family tree based on the research presented here is appended at the end of the chapter – see Figure 9.8.

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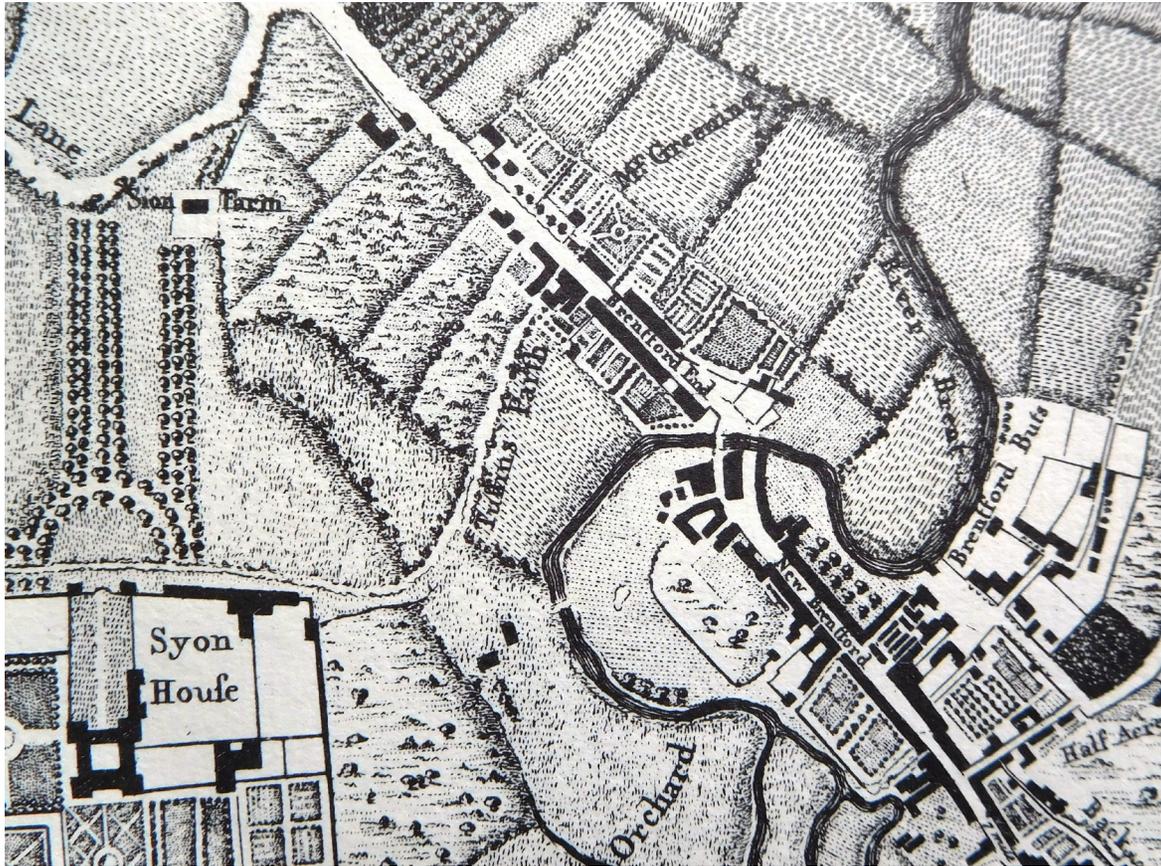


Figure 9.1: Detail from John Rocque's proposal for his map of London dated 1741. This shows the nursery of 'Mr Greening' specifically labelled on the main road out of London to the west, and also its close relationship to Syon House. Photo copyright Val Bott, CC BY-NC 4.0.

out of the capital to the west of England, opposite a footway leading into the Duke of Northumberland's Syon estate (which was landscaped by Brown from in the mid-1750s). By the early-eighteenth century the area was already known for its orchards and nursery gardens, as depicted in detail on John Rocque's map of the *Environs of London*, issued in 1746. The straggle of houses along the road formed a small suburb of the significant market town of Brentford; the busy road and the market crowds ensured that the business would have been noticed and well patronised. The nursery may have existed before the Greenings became its owners, but it was managed by Thomas Greening senior (1684–1757) from at least 1709 and was handed down through the family for several decades. Thomas senior moved in a horticultural circle that included fellow nurseryman, Thomas Fairchild, with whom he shared imported melon seeds in 1740³ and from whom, according to a note by Thomas junior, he rented land,⁴ as well as the botanist, Peter Collinson, who sent him a box of American seeds in 1754.⁵

Visitors to the nursery in the early-eighteenth century admired a range of plants and skills on show. In August 1719 the Reverend George Harbin⁶ visited Thomas Greening senior. He noted the large quantities of apples, pears, dwarf peaches, nectarines, and apricots, all grafted onto Paradise stocks, some of which, Greening told him, he had been growing in pots and tubs for over fourteen years. He removed them from the pots every year

³ Maurice Johnson of Ayscough: letter to his father, 24 March 1740, sending melon seeds other unidentified seeds procured via Fairchild, who was present when Greening opened packages of seeds 'brought into the kingdom for his Majesty', quoted in full in Penn, K. (2008). *A desk-based survey of the archaeology of Ayscough Hall gardens, Spalding* (Report 1618). NAU Archaeology.

⁴ The National Archives (TNA), C108/353, item 15 note of accounts.

⁵ *An account of the first introduction of American seeds into Great Britain by Peter Collinson* 16 Dec 1766, Botanical Library, Natural History Museum, quoted in Roberts, J. (1997). *Royal landscape, the gardens & parks of Windsor*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

⁶ McGarvie, M. & Harvey, J. H. (1983). The Revd George Harbin and his memoirs of gardening 1716–23. *Garden History*, 11(1), 6–36.

for root pruning, to encourage better blossom the following spring. Harbin also discussed with Greening his vine and his flowering plants, including anemones, ranunculus, and tulips. Another visitor, Richard Bradley, was also impressed with Greening's achievements. In 1731 he wrote about Greening's passion tree with over 300 ripe fruits upon it, saying it was planted in cow dung 'and had, from time to time, the place about it renew'd with the same cooling soil'.⁷ He also described Greening's use of double reed 'hedges', placed on both sides of his espalier fruit trees, to protect them from 'blighting winds' and rain in the winter months.

Thomas Greening Senior

Thomas Greening senior was born at Great Haseley in Oxfordshire in 1684, the son of another Thomas Greening, a yeoman. In 1724⁸ he was described as 'for about 30 years bred up in the art of gardening', suggesting an apprenticeship in the mid-1690s or training alongside his father.⁹ It is not clear when Thomas Greening senior settled at Brentford End, but he was certainly resident by 1709, when his daughter Rachel was baptised at Isleworth Parish Church. Harbin described an established garden in 1719, where the range, quantity, and quality of plants might perhaps be explained by Greening having taken over an existing, established nursery. Whatever its earlier history, this was the place where Thomas senior brought up his family of seven children and trained his four sons, Thomas, Robert, John, and Richard, in horticulture.

The family also had a connection for at least two generations with north-west Herefordshire. In about 1720 Thomas Greening senior was engaged to lay out the grand, formal gardens at Shobdon Court, for William, later 1st Viscount Bateman. Thomas leased a farm at Aymestrey, a village owned by Lord Bateman three miles from his house; this may have been Court Farm, a timber-framed house which still stands.¹⁰ By 1733 Thomas's second son, Robert, was supervising the Shobdon gardens and managing Bateman's garden workers.¹¹ He was living at the farm with his sister Betsey, where they grew barley, oats, rye, French wheat, vetches, and turnips, but the farm was in a remote rural area prone to flooding and they struggled to make it profitable. Nevertheless, the family retained it into the 1740s and, through marriages and friendships, sustained a long connection with Herefordshire, despite its distance from their Brentford End base.

Part of the Herefordshire farm was used as a nursery ground for their elm trees. In 1734 Lord Bateman agreed to the planting of more elms on his estate, stipulating that, when the lease of the farm expired or the Greenings left, he should have half of the trees and they would have the rest.¹² Thomas senior was promoting his method of raising elms by grafting English elm, whose silhouette was favoured, upon Dutch elm root-stock, which not only made the trees easier to establish in a variety of soils but also encouraged speedier growth. In 1724 George I awarded him a royal patent, protecting his method of grafting English elm onto Dutch elm stock for fourteen years.¹³ Thomas senior was rarely at Aymestrey. Robert's letters discouraged his father from making the arduous 150-mile journey, especially in winter, when his health was not robust. He did, however, recommend his father should take the waters at Llandrindod Wells, thirty miles away, when he was expected to visit in October 1733.

From 1722 Thomas senior was responsible for part of Princess Caroline's garden at Richmond Lodge, where Charles Bridgeman, who was the leading designer of Thomas's generation, became Chief Gardener. These were the early years of implementing the princess's plans for enhancing the garden, before the involvement of William Kent in the late 1720s and early 1730s.¹⁴ When the Prince and Princess of Wales (later George II and Queen Caroline) were given the property in 1722, Thomas Greening senior would have been the obvious choice to supervise the gardens since his expertise was well known, his nursery stock substantial and wide-ranging, and he was just a short journey away across the Thames by horse-ferry. Only one other nursery with a

⁷ Bradley, R. (1731). *New improvements of planting and gardening* (p. 100). London: W. Mears.

⁸ British Library, Eg Ch S108.

⁹ London Metropolitan Archives, Ref nos COL/CHD/FR/02/0298-0300 and COL/CHD/FR/02/0218-0223, apprenticeship indentures for two of his brothers.

¹⁰ Herefordshire Record Office, G39/4/8: mortgage quoting history since 1719, 'lands occupied by Thomas Greening now let to Robert Preece for £169 per annum'.

¹¹ TNA, C108/353: 15 letters and a note of accounts 1733–42.

¹² TNA, C108/353: letter 2.

¹³ British Library, Eg Ch S108.

¹⁴ C12/276/11.

substantial stock of trees was to be found nearby, that of Richard Butt of Kew, who supplied trees for the garden at Richmond in 1734.¹⁵ However, the elms used in the avenues and in creating an amphitheatre were probably Greening's, given the family's specialism.

The success of the Greenings' nursery is demonstrated by the number of prestigious clients for whom they provided plants. For example, Lord Foley,¹⁶ a friend of Lord Bateman, purchased fruit trees for Newport House, Herefordshire, in the 1720s and elms and peach trees were supplied to Holkham in Norfolk in 1728. Greening worked on Sir Herbert Mackworth's gardens at The Gnoll in Neath in the 1720s¹⁷ and at Longleat in 1736¹⁸ for Lord Weymouth. Colonel Lord Henry Beauclerk owed the Greenings money for trees, flowering shrubs, and work at Foliejohn, Berkshire, in 1738. After the deaths of Queen Caroline in 1737 and of Bridgeman in 1738, Thomas Greening senior and his son Thomas were jointly appointed as Chief Gardeners at Richmond for an annual fee of £1,142-17s-6d.¹⁹

By Christmas 1738, however, Thomas senior, by then in his mid-fifties, agreed to make over the business to his sons in return for an annual payment of £200. By Lady Day 1739 he had moved to a smaller house with six acres of land called 'The Pightle' in Turnham Green, leased from Lord Burlington. However, he had not retired and continued to manage garden contracts during the 1740s. He worked at Corsham Court, Wiltshire, and for the Duke of Marlborough at Windsor, where he was owed £2,000 by 1744, and was paid a further £3,000 in 1747 and 1748.²⁰ Greening's early association with Marlborough and Windsor is important because one of the duke's royal positions was as Ranger of Windsor Great Park, a role in which he was succeeded by the Duke of Cumberland. The Greenings were engaged at the Great Park for two generations on projects, which, though lesser known, were substantial royal enterprises and provided the Greenings with the prestige of royal and noble contacts.

Thomas senior's first wife, Ann, the mother of all those gardening sons, died in 1733. As part of his new life in Turnham Green Thomas found a second wife, marrying Lucretia Abbott, the propertied widow of a Chiswick carpenter, in 1745. After Thomas senior died in 1757 Lucretia, now widowed for a second time, continued to renew the lease of The Pightle and the house until she died in 1781. Her stepson Robert Greening thought fondly of her, bequeathing her an annuity of £20 a year in the codicil to his will in 1757.²¹

Thomas Greening Junior

After his father left in 1739, Thomas junior moved into the family home at the Brentford End nursery. Though no baptism record has been traced, he was the oldest and the favoured son, something which rankled with his brother Robert, only a few years his junior. In about 1730 Thomas junior married Sarah, the daughter of Henry Marsh, a gentleman gardener with a Hammersmith estate and a friend of his father. Their son Henry Thomas (named after his two grandfathers) was baptised in June 1731. The marriage settlement required by Henry Marsh placed a heavy and continuing burden upon the Greening family. It resulted in half the nursery being settled upon Thomas junior, in what he later described as a ten-year co-partnership agreement with his father. Contracts and profits and losses were to be shared between father and son equally, though, should the royal contract end, Thomas senior would have one third of all profits. Robert was to be paid £100 a year as if he were an employee, an arrangement later changed to a share of the produce and profits.

Thomas junior was henceforth concerned to manage the nursery finances closely. When he received each quarterly payment for the Richmond garden contract he often left his father's share with a relative, William Greening, in Glasshouse Street, London, or sometimes with a Mr Morris in Russell Street, Covent Garden. His

¹⁵ Desmond, R. (2007). *The history of the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew* (p. 360). Kew: Kew Publishing.

¹⁶ Register of Parks and Gardens of Special Historic Interest. Available at parksandgardens.org, accessed 30 May 2016; TNA, C108/353, letter 5). Robert Greening wrote to his father, January 1736, 'Lord Foley planning garden work in Worcestershire worth £3,000, Thomas the Elder should speak to Lord Bateman about getting the contract'.

¹⁷ Currie, C. K., Howes, L. and Locock, M. (1996). Fishpond Wood Cascade, The Gnoll, West Glamorgan. *Archaeologia Cambrensis*, 143, 236–271.

¹⁸ Mowl, T. W. (1995). Rococo and later landscaping at Longleat. *Garden History*, 23, 56–66.

¹⁹ TNA, WORK 6/8 ff 57–62.

²⁰ British Library, Althorp papers, E 11, quoted in Roberts, J. (1997). *Royal landscape, the gardens & parks of Windsor*.

²¹ TNA, PROB 11/836.



Figure 9.2: Cartouche from *A New Plan of Richmond Garden*, John Rocque, 1748, dedicated to Thomas Greening Junior and his brother Robert. Photo copyright Val Bott, CC BY-NC 4.0.

letters to his father are full of financial anxieties, his need to find loans, and complaints about the way his father kept the accounts. In February 1740 he wrote, 'I pay a great deal more than I iamagined the Whole affair would come to, and this Asure you I am so put to for mony that I dont know which way to go to git any'.²²

²² TNA, C108/353 letter 8.

Thomas senior, it seems, was apt to take away the Nursery Book full of the business accounts from time to time, and when it was returned Thomas junior found unpaid bills within it and sought their payment, only to find – to his embarrassment – that payment had been made to his father and clients had receipts to prove it. Sometimes it was a question of having no cash to deal with overdue sums for supplies and services. For example, in July 1739, Henry Woodman, a nurseryman at nearby Strand on the Green, was amongst the tradespeople pressing for bills to be paid, while in July 1742 Mr Tunstall, the owner of the horse-ferry, called to seek payment for tolls incurred between 1725 and 1737.²³ However, on the death of his father-in-law in 1741, Thomas junior inherited Henry Marsh's substantial property in Hammersmith and Kensington, and his wife received £1,000, her share of her late mother's jointure, so the couple were far from impoverished.

After their father stepped back from the business during the 1740s, Thomas junior and Robert were responsible for managing and maintaining the royal garden at Richmond. This was the time during which the young Lancelot Brown was managing and extending the famed gardens at Stowe for Lord Cobham, gaining experience and influential contacts along the way. The Greening involvement at Richmond was commemorated in John Rocque's handsome 1748 engraving of the site, which was dedicated to them. Rocque probably knew the family. He trained as a gardener, his brother Bartholomew ran garden ground in Fulham, and he labelled the Brentford End nursery with the name 'Mr Greening' on the small map used in the proposal for his monumental map of London and its environs published in 1746 (Figure 9.1). In the published list of subscribers are the names of Thomas Greening Esq, Mr John Greening, and Mr Robert Greening. The royal contract for Richmond meant direct contact with the king, so in July 1739 Thomas junior could report proudly:

The King was at Richmond Saturday last, he talkd much to me of Affairs, and said the Gardens were very fine keep and much beter than any he had or ever saw.²⁴

Despite the joint dedication on Rocque's plan to the two brothers, their relationship was not destined to be harmonious (Figure 9.2). When Thomas junior wished to bring his own son, Henry Thomas, into the business, he 'thought it proper to discharge [Robert]' and took the keys to the Richmond Garden from him in late March 1751.²⁵ He must have known that he was about to be awarded the contract for Kensington Gardens and St. James's Park, confirmed in April 1751, a contract Robert had hoped would be his.²⁶ Thomas junior's behaviour caused such a serious rift between the two brothers that Robert launched a legal case against him.²⁷ Besides the work covered by the contract for managing Kensington, Thomas junior undertook additional commissions there. He was paid for two substantial projects valued at £799-13s-0d in June 1752, and a further £354-5s-0d for gravelling new walks in February 1753.²⁸

Thomas junior's wife, Sarah, died in June 1756 and was buried at Isleworth; her husband was buried beside her in September 1757. Henry Thomas Greening, who dealt with his father's probate, appears to have taken over the business at Brentford End. Thomas junior's death left two royal contracts vacant, that at Richmond and another for Kensington Gardens and St. James's Park, contracts which his brothers, John and Robert, now hoped to take on together.

Robert Greening

The second son of the family, Robert Greening must have been born only a few years after Thomas, though no record has been traced of his baptism. He worked as a boy with his father at Richmond Gardens since he later reminisced that he 'was brought up for gardening business by the late Queen's express order'.²⁹ His open character can be seen in his affectionate and chatty letters to his father which contrast with his brother Thomas's more formal style. He was extremely frustrated at being left at the Aymestry farm in the 1730s, in 'that Country

²³ TNA, C108/353 letter 7; Layton Collection, Ferry Book 1734–37 (Thomas Layton Trust/Hounslow Local Studies Library); TNA, C108/353 letter 13 Ledger 53 f 234.

²⁴ TNA, PROB 11.353 letter 7.

²⁵ TNA, C12/276/11, Petition of Robert Greening, 1751, and response from Thomas Greening the Younger, 1752.

²⁶ TNA, WORK 6/8, ff 97–101, warrant with scheme, 2 April 1751.

²⁷ TNA, C12/276/11.

²⁸ TNA, T1/353, 2, 3a, 3b and 115.

²⁹ British Library: Add Ms 32873 f 534, letter to the Duke of Newcastle, 1757.



Figure 9.3: *Windsor Great Park with Virginia Water, looking north*, Thomas Sandby, c. 1753–60. Royal Collection Trust / © Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II 2019.

which was design'd only for a Burial place for the Indolent & not the Indoustrious.³⁰ The young man yearned to return to work out of the Brentford Nursery, claiming he could make £200 a year there.³¹

Robert married Ann, a widow and daughter of Priscilla Price of Lucton, who he must have met during his period in Herefordshire. Writing his will in 1750 he described her as his 'dear and affectionate wife'.³² Once his father had moved to Turnham Green and his brother Thomas had taken over the family house, Robert would have needed a home of his own; his will mentioned a recently purchased estate in Lucton and a property in Isleworth.

While Thomas junior fretted about money, Robert was the creative one, designing elegant landscapes in the 1740s and 1750s at Kirtlington, Wimpole, and Virginia Water. Robert still worked with his father and brother, Thomas junior, at Richmond and, on the evidence of the surviving letters, both brothers also spent time in Herefordshire, Thomas until 1741 and Robert until 1742. But Robert was beginning to make a business of his own. The Greenings' work at Windsor shows him emerging, with payments due in 1744 to Mr Greening (presumably his father) but payment in 1748 to Robert Greening and Company for works associated with the creation of a new, large-scale lake at the southern end of Windsor Great Park – Virginia Water (Figure 9.3) – and the planting of Smith's Lawn to its north.³³ The elegant landscape with its lake and irregular clumps of trees was depicted in Thomas Sandby's watercolour of about 1753.³⁴

After the split from his brother in 1751, Robert was working independently and almost certainly with his youngest brother Richard, hence the 'and Company'. Though attributed by some to Thomas, the plans for Kirtlington in Oxfordshire of about 1746 are almost certainly his (Figure 9.4); the small amount of handwriting on the plan closely resembles that of his letters and the design bears a marked resemblance to the plans for Wimpole. The proposals were to provide a setting for Sir James Dashwood's new mansion, designed in 1741, to be built within a clearing in old woodland. Robert's eclectic rococo design provided winding walks between shrubberies and clumps of trees in a manner similar to early plans of Brown's from this period.³⁵ Six pavilions were scattered throughout the pleasure ground, each in a different style. The largest, set in an open central area, overlooked by a large garden seat, appears to have been a circular, domed temple, with columns and steps up to a central door with niches for statues on each side. The grassy area where it stands was bordered with herms and urns on plinths. Another resembles a medieval ruin, a third had rusticated walls and a dark doorway, but no windows and three spires or obelisks on the roof, whilst the final one was an oriental tent with a tasselled

³⁰ TNA, C108/353 letter 13.

³¹ TNA, C108/353 letter 1.

³² TNA, PROB 11/836.

³³ TNA, LR 4/6/31.

³⁴ Thomas Sandby, c. 1753, Royal Collection RL 14640.

³⁵ Robert Greening, design for Kirtlington, Christopher Buxton and Kirtlington Park Ltd; Brown, D. & Williamson, T. (2016). *Lancelot Brown and the Capability Men: Landscape revolution in eighteenth-century England* (pp. 76–78). London: Reaktion Books.



Figure 9.4: Plan of Kirtlington, Robert Greening, c. 1746. © Richard Cragg 2015, courtesy of Christopher Buxton & Kirtlington Park Ltd. Reproduced with kind permission.

canopy. All were designed to be discovered amongst the planting, to provide retreats and refuges for activities such as reading or taking tea. The pleasure grounds were to be divided from the park with a ha-ha, an innovation introduced by Charles Bridgeman at Richmond, where Robert would have seen it.

It is unlikely, however, that any of this was implemented – at the upper edge a note has been added to the plan which reads ‘Greenings plan totally changd by Browne’. In 1751 Dashwood seems to have lost interest and instead commissioned Brown, who had been working for a number of his friends and neighbours, to devise a scheme for his park and gardens. This was an early commission for the young Lancelot and perhaps an obvious choice of alternative designer for Dashwood. Brown had been just fifteen miles away, at Stowe, for the best part of a decade. In 1749 his patron, Lord Cobham, had died and a short while later he left Stowe, moved to Hammersmith, and set up business on his own account.

Whilst disappointed at Kirtlington, at Wimpole Robert not only produced designs for the 1st Earl of Hardwicke but also oversaw their implementation. He was to sweep away the formal seventeenth-century parterres and modify the works of Bridgeman and others dating from the 1720s and 1730s. Mark Laird describes Greening’s achievement at Wimpole as ‘translating William Kent’s vocabulary of parkland clumps into the vocabulary of the pleasure ground.’³⁶ He goes on to suggest that Greening’s designs and planting schemes pointed the way ahead, placing him in advance of Brown, who was destined to work here too, but not until the mid-1760s, by which time Robert Greening was dead.

David Adshead has described in detail Robert Greening’s work at Wimpole.³⁷ Hardwicke knew both the 1st Duke of Newcastle and the Duke of Cumberland, either of whom may have recommended Robert Greening to him. Dating from 1751 or 1752, Robert’s designs – two plans for the pleasure ground, one for the kitchen garden, and an ink sketch – together with his instructions, demonstrate his experience, expertise, and professionalism in managing a contract, as well as designing a garden.³⁸ Greening sent instructions to Hardwicke’s agent, John Bird, in September 1752 about excavating and constructing a ha-ha, retaining the best earth for use elsewhere in the garden.³⁹ The earth was to be mixed with that removed from other locations to ensure even growth of the planting. He also sent directions to Mr Moses, Hardwicke’s head gardener, and advised on storing shrubs and flowering plants salvaged for re-use in new locations, keeping them in groups according to their varieties, in the old part of the kitchen garden.⁴⁰ He recommended extremely careful weeding in areas that were to be turfed, especially couch grass and horseradish. Where the turf was to be laid, all traces of the walls of the old kitchen garden were to be removed to at least eighteen inches deep ‘else in Summer the Grass will burn and Shew where each wall was’. His detailed design for the new kitchen garden specified the planting of over 200 varieties of fruit, and required works to be done there ready for spring planting, including obtaining tan or oak bark for moving the pineapple plants.⁴¹

The year 1751, when garden works at Wimpole began, was also the year in which Robert Greening petitioned Hardwicke, who was then the Lord Chancellor, for redress in relation to his brother Thomas’s treatment of him. There is no evidence that the case was resolved, but, after the blow of this family rift, Robert’s appointment as gardener at Princess Augusta’s Kew garden in 1753 must have felt very sweet, especially since it directly adjoined Richmond Garden, which were in Thomas junior’s charge. Robert’s contracts for Kew survive amongst the papers of Sir George Lee, Treasurer to Augusta, Princess of Wales, in the 1750s. Robert took on the care of her pleasure ground in 1753, replacing John Dillman, who retained management of the six-acre kitchen garden, the melon ground, and the orangery. Robert was to be paid 300 guineas a year and was to ‘buy at his own expense a sufficient Flock of Sheep to feed the Lawn’, for which he was to have use of fifty-four acres of farmland.⁴² He was also to care for Augusta’s nine cows.⁴³ On the renewal of the contract in January 1757, the fee rose to 400 guineas a year, taking into account the increase in size of the property, from thirty-five acres in

³⁶ Laird, M. (1999). *The flowering of the landscape garden: English pleasure grounds, 1720–1800* (p. 120). Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

³⁷ Adshead, D. (2007). *Wimpole: Architectural drawings and topographical views* (pp. 52–57). Bromley: National Trust.

³⁸ National Trust: WIM/D/456–459, illustrated and described in Adshead, D. *Wimpole*.

³⁹ British Library: Add Ms 35679 ff 73–75; see Adshead, D. *Wimpole*.

⁴⁰ British Library: Add Ms 35679 f 71; see Adshead, D. *Wimpole*.

⁴¹ British Library: Add Ms 35679 f 96; see Adshead, D. *Wimpole*.

⁴² The sheep were depicted in a painting by Johan Jacob Schalch, c. 1759 (Royal Collection RCIN 403517) and an engraving by William Woollett (Historic Royal Palaces HRP 01764).

⁴³ Centre for Buckinghamshire Studies: D/LE/C6/5.



Figure 9.5: *A View of the Palace from a Hill in the middle of the Lawn with the Bridge, the temples of Bellona, of Pan, of Aeolus, & the House of Confucius in the Royal Gardens at Kew*, which depicts The White House. J.S. Mason after William Woollett, 1760s. © Historic Royal Palaces.

1753 to 110 acres in 1757, and the fact that Dillman had resigned in 1756, so that Robert was also now responsible for the kitchen garden in his place.⁴⁴

In 1754 Robert dredged the six-acre lake with its three-acre island, planted the adjacent mound, and levelled the ground beyond the lawn in order to improve the view of the lake from Augusta's residence, The White House (Figure 9.5). The following year he undertook the gravelling of the path leading to Goupy's Chinese Arch and oversaw 'the erection of a large Chinese temple on one column with a neat Chinese chair to go round the same' and 'a small bell temple neatly painted with ornaments fix'd up on the flower garden.'⁴⁵ In 1757 he proposed laying out the former nursery as a ten-acre wilderness, a scheme requiring over 50,000 plants and estimated to cost almost £290.⁴⁶

The creation of these exotic structures, together with his eclectic designs for garden pavilions at Kirtlington and an oriental summer house for Wimpole, may demonstrate the influence of Richard (Dickie) Bateman, brother of the 1st Viscount Bateman.⁴⁷ Robert would have known him in Herefordshire, where Bateman transformed the ancient Shobdon parish church beside the mansion into a gothic fantasy between 1746 and 1758. Bateman bought a seventeenth-century house in Old Windsor with fourteen acres of garden in about 1730.

⁴⁴ Centre for Buckinghamshire Studies: D/LE/C6/15.

⁴⁵ Desmond, R. (2007). *Royal Botanic Gardens* (p. 33–34).

⁴⁶ Bodleian Library MS North b.15 f 17r.

⁴⁷ National Trust: WIM/D/456.

Here he added Chinese-gothic extensions and re-designed the garden in a whimsical mixture of Chinese, Indian, and gothic styles. This may have influenced the construction of the Duke of Cumberland's Mandarin Yacht, which adorned Virginia Water, for which the designer remains unknown.

In September 1757, after his brother Thomas's death, Robert sought to take over Thomas's contract for the adjoining Richmond Garden and that for Kensington and St. James's Park with his brother John. That December Robert added a codicil to his will.⁴⁸ In the previous eighteen months, the family had been devastated to lose their father, Thomas senior, as well as Thomas junior and his wife; now Robert wrote that his 'dear, dear Wife is not expected to live' and she was indeed buried in January 1758. The transfer of royal contracts remained unresolved when Robert died soon after in March 1758 and was buried beside his wife at Isleworth.

The loss of so many Greening family members between 1756 and 1760 had a devastating impact. The parish registers for Isleworth do not record the cause of deaths, but, with Thomas junior's wife dying in 1756, Thomas senior and Thomas junior in 1757, Robert and his wife in early 1758, and Richard in 1760, it is possible that serious illness afflicted them. The London bills of mortality show raised numbers of deaths from smallpox in the capital in these years. Not only did the Greenings travel a good deal themselves but Brentford's busy market also brought in great crowds, who could have carried the infection.

John Greening

John Greening's baptism record has also proved elusive, but he was the third of Thomas Greening senior's sons. John Greening's career appears to have been focused on the Esher area of Surrey and specifically the influential garden of the Duke of Newcastle at Claremont. This was yet another place where the Greenings' involvement preceded work by Brown, who later rebuilt the house and reworked the grounds for Clive of India in the 1770s. Back in the 1720s and 1730s, Thomas senior had worked for the Duke of Newcastle⁴⁹ when major changes led by Charles Bridgeman and William Kent were taking place there. It may have been the connection between Bridgeman and Thomas senior at the royal garden in Richmond that brought the Greenings to Esher. In 1747, when he was twenty-two and about to be married to Anne Petty of Esher, John wrote to the Duke rather directly asking him to deliver on his repeated promises to 'do something for him.' He said he had been at the estate for sixteen years (confirming that he had been there as a boy) and implied he would leave if not promoted.⁵⁰

Rocque's handsome engraving of the Claremont Estate, published in 1738, is decorated with vignettes which include 'Mr Greening's House'. Part of this substantial building also provided storage for fruit from the estate; today it is used by sixth-form students of the school which occupies the mansion (Figure 9.6). At this date Thomas junior and Robert were running the Brentford End nursery as well as the Herefordshire farm and, as John was still a boy, Thomas senior, by then a widower, may have stayed there for long periods.

John's own special expertise became the cultivation of luxurious fruits, a skill his master greatly prized, serving exotic items to guests at picnics and sending them as gifts. Because the king adored his peaches, in one particular year Newcastle asked Greening to send 'eight peaches of the red sort every two days as well as six nectarines and six plumbs'. In August 1750 Greening recorded that he had sent out 'between three and four hundred melons this week'. He oversaw six acres of walled garden, containing over 300 each of apple and pear trees, 200 cherries, plum trees and vines, along with melons, quinces, figs, apricots, currants, nectarines, gooseberries, mulberries, and pineapples.⁵¹ There he propagated the *Claremont Nectarine* in 1759 and the *Prolific Strawberry* and managed the longest heated wall in England, at 960 feet with 24 fires.⁵²

By the time the eldest Greening brother, Thomas junior, died in 1757 Newcastle had become Prime Minister so was in a strong position to recommend to the king the name of a successor to manage some of the royal gardens. John is likely to have contacted him directly on this matter, while Robert wrote to the Earl of Hardwicke, his patron at Wimpole, hoping that he would mention the brothers favourably to the Duke: '[I] solicit again

⁴⁸ TNA, PROB 11/836.

⁴⁹ TNA, SP 36/36 f 93: Thomas Greening to Newcastle asking for money to pay his men, October 1735.

⁵⁰ British Library: Add Ms 33066: John Greening to Newcastle 10 August 1747, quoted in Kelch, R. A. (1974). *Newcastle, a Duke without money: Thomas Pelham-Holles 1693–1768*. London: Routledge and K. Paul.

⁵¹ Chessum, S., Rogers, K. & Rowell, C. (2000). *Claremont, Surrey*. Bromley: National Trust.

⁵² Lindley, G. (1831). *Guide to the orchard & kitchen garden* (p. 287). London: Longman, Rees, Orme, Brown & Green.



Figure 9.6: *White Cottage, Claremont*. Copyright Ian Capper, 2013 CC BY-SA 2.0. URL: www.geograph.org.uk/photo/3655290. Mr Greening's symmetrical house, to the east of the mansion at Claremont. It is used by the school based at Claremont, although the gardens and landscape are managed by the National Trust.

your Lordship's recommendation to His Grace of Newcastle to succeed jointly with my brother John.⁵³ And, aware that George II knew his family well, he was also able to write, 'I have heard that His Majesty has asked what Sons his Old Greening left'.⁵⁴

The decision was slow to come and had not been resolved by March 1758, when Robert died. Several of Lancelot Brown's clients immediately petitioned for these contracts on his behalf:

We whose Names are underwritten, being well-wishers of Mr. Browne, whose Abilities and Merit we are fully acquainted with, do most earnestly request the Duke of Newcastle to promote his speedy appointment to the care of Kensington Gardens agreeable to his Grace's very obliging promises in this respect.⁵⁵

In the event, John took over the gardens at Kew, Kensington, and St. James's after his brother Thomas's death, plus the Richmond contract when Robert died. However, the zenith of John's success came in 1758, when the post of Chief Gardener at Hampton Court became vacant on the death of George Lowe. Brown's name was again put forward, but John Greening also won this contract, worth £1,107-6s-0d a year for almost seventy-four acres, together with that for the Treasury Garden (now the garden of 10 Downing Street). To continue a practice made for his predecessor, John was paid an additional £100 a year '[i]n regard to his extraordinary Charge in raising Pine Apples for His Majesty & the royal family' at Hampton Court. As the surviving member of the family, he consolidated all their positions, and was therefore at the top of his field for almost three years. At about this time he had a fine portrait painted by Soldi, which shows him holding a design for a garden.⁵⁶ He probably moved to live in Wilderness House at Hampton Court, which had some status as the Chief Gardener's House; it would also have been convenient for Esher as well as his other garden work.

⁵³ British Library: Add Ms 35595 f 80: Robert Greening to the Earl of Hardwicke, 3 September 1757.

⁵⁴ British Library: Add Ms 32873 f 534: Robert Greening to Lord Newcastle, 9 September 1757.

⁵⁵ Stroud, D. (1975). *Capability Brown* (pp. 121–122); Desmond, R. (2007). *Royal Botanic Gardens* (p. 361).

⁵⁶ At Kentchurch Court, Herefordshire.

On the death of George II and the accession of his grandson, George III, in 1760, John Greening's position was weakened, though he was paid for additional work for the Duke of Cumberland at the Maestricht Garden at Windsor in 1761.⁵⁷ Despite her earlier employment of Robert, Princess Augusta did not particularly favour the Greening family and her friend, the 3rd Earl of Bute, sought appointments for his favourites and advised the new king accordingly. The Surveyor of Works reported to Bute in February 1761 that he had 'notified according to your lordship's order to Mr Greening that he is no longer to have the care of the Kensington Gardens' and John Hill was appointed in his place.⁵⁸ Again at Bute's behest, John Greening was removed from the Kew and Richmond Gardens in 1762 in favour of the Haverfields, father and son, leaving him with only Hampton Court and the Treasury Garden.⁵⁹

In the spring of 1763 George Grenville became Prime Minister. As a nephew of Viscount Cobham of Stowe, he would have long known Lancelot Brown. Soon Brown was promised Hampton Court, and the warrant was issued in the summer of 1764. Press announcements suggested that John Greening had resigned, when he was actually deeply upset by this development. He wrote to his friend, John Twells, Newcastle's steward:

My Lord Halifax told me He thought my case excessively hard, that he would go directly to Mr Grenville: who told Him it was the King's Order, then He went to the King and told him he was excessively sorry to hear that I was to be turned out to make way for Brown, that I had been at great expence to bring the garden to such fine order from such an execreable condition it was in when I came to it.⁶⁰

John continued to oversee the Treasury Garden until 1768, probably through an oversight, as no warrant was issued to Brown until then. He appears to have continued to work for Newcastle and the Pelham family, but may also have helped run the family nursery in Esher. When he died in June 1770 he was buried with his father and siblings at Isleworth.⁶¹

Richard Greening

The youngest son, referred to as 'Dickey' in family letters, spent some time living at the Aymestrey farm with his brother Robert and sister Betsey. Robert wrote to his father in July 1742 that 'it is a very great Concern to me that he has so Small a Share of Education' but felt Richard may do 'as well as the rest of us' if given the opportunity.⁶² He reassured his father that he and Thomas would 'not be wanting in their Brotherly help to him'. We know little of his gardening activities, but most probably he worked with his brother as Robert Greening and Company. When he died Thomas Greening the Elder left his 'bullet gun', inlaid with silver, to Richard, along with the residue of his estate, and made him his executor though Robert and John were not mentioned in the will.⁶³ Robert also made Richard his executor alongside John. It was not long before he too died and was buried at Isleworth in October 1760.

Henry Thomas Greening, later Gott

Henry Thomas Greening was born in 1731, the son of Thomas junior, and was baptised at St. Lawrence, New Brentford, a short walk from the nursery. He married Ann Hooper, from a gentry family in Kington, Herefordshire, at Hampton, Middlesex, in 1761 and they had six children. He already saw himself as a gentleman, having had his portrait painted in 1753 by Soldi (who also portrayed his uncle John), posing with his dog and his hunting gun.⁶⁴

⁵⁷ TNA, AO 1 2464/196.

⁵⁸ Desmond, R. (2007). *Royal Botanic Gardens* (p. 37).

⁵⁹ TNA, WORK 6/13 f 195, quoted in Roberts, J. *Royal landscape*.

⁶⁰ British Library: Additional MS 32960, f 50, John Greening to J. Twells, 23 June 1764.

⁶¹ Johnson, P. (2008). Unseen Hands: The gardeners Greening 1719–1764, unpublished.

⁶² TNA, C108/353 letter 7.

⁶³ TNA, PROB 11/837.

⁶⁴ At Kentchurch Court, Herefordshire.



PARKS, PADDOCKS,

*Pleasure Grounds, Gardens,
Laid out in the Newest & most*

elegant Taste,
by J. Greening,

E S H E R,
Surveyor.

Robt. & Greenhouses

built on the most approved Plans

Substantial sums, including an annual fee of £870-18s-6d, were paid to Henry Thomas as ‘Mr Greening’ for works for the Duke of Cumberland at Windsor and at Cumberland House between 1762 and 1765.⁶⁵ This included works on China Island, the site of the Duke’s Chinese Pavilion at the western end of Virginia Water, as well as creating a new plantation at Shrubs Hill in 1764, and work around the grotto at the other end of the lake in 1765 including planting shrubs, young trees, and flowers at ‘the Garden by the Cave’.⁶⁶

After his father Thomas junior’s death, Henry Thomas inherited the property left by his grandfather, Henry Marsh, as well as the Brentford End nursery. He appears in the 1767 Isleworth land tax assessment as Thomas Greening, with over 100 acres, some leased from the Syon estate, and four tenements. In November 1763 *The London Chronicle* reported that he had donated a fat ox to the poor of his local community because they were suffering from the severity of the weather and the frozen Thames.

In 1766 Henry Thomas inherited a substantial estate from Mary Gott, a distant relative. This was conditional on his changing his name. He complied, petitioning the House of Lords in November 1768, and in 1769 a map of the new turnpike road marks the Brentford End nursery site as ‘Mr Gotts’. Now he was a gentleman of property. He sold the Sussex estate he had inherited and purchased Newlands Park in Buckinghamshire in 1770; there he indulged a love of horses, acquiring a racehorse called Tyrant and enthusiastically hunting with staghounds.⁶⁷ He went on to become Buckinghamshire County Sheriff and was knighted in 1774. Henry Thomas was buried in Isleworth in 1809, and the following year, his widow, Dame Ann, retired to Little Boston, an elegant house just north of Brentford leased from family friends, the Clitherows of Boston Manor House, where she remained until her death in 1815.

The Esher Greenings

Greenings continued to flourish as gardeners in Esher. An advertisement in *The London Evening Post* for 22nd–25th February 1772 announced that ‘the business of the late John Greening of Esher, Surrey, is now continued in all its branches by his son, John Greening & Co, nurserymen and seedsmen’. Another advertisement, in the *St. James’s Chronicle*, 24th–26th April 1777, announced that ‘Thomas Greening of Esher in Surrey, son of the late Mr John Greening, begs leave to acquaint the nobility, gentry and his friends in general that he intends laying out parks, paddocks, pasture grounds, gardens &c, in the newest and neatest taste. Hot and Green houses built on the most approved schemes’. A later advertisement in the *St. James’s Chronicle*, 16th–18th March 1784, a year after the death of Lancelot Brown, promoted a Thomas Greening, land surveyor, probably the same man.

A fine advertisement for T. Greening’s garden services, including the construction of hothouses and greenhouses, is preserved within the ephemera collection amassed by Sarah Sophia (1744–1818), sister of the celebrated botanist Sir Joseph Banks, and now held in the British Museum (Figure 9.7). Their family owned Spring Grove, a mansion in Isleworth a little further west from the Greenings’ nursery, and the families were in fact distantly related by marriage through the Gott family. The date, 1788, has been written on the engraving by Sarah Sophia and it is conceivable that she met the Thomas Greening in question. One further Thomas Greening was a gardener at Frogmore, Windsor, likely to be yet another connection between the royal family and the Greenings. He was consulted in 1792 by Banks when he was seeking information on the newly identified woolly aphid then causing serious damage to apple trees.⁶⁸

⁶⁵ Royal Archives: CP vol 79/14, 30, 62, 78, 90, 105, 112b. ‘Extraordinary Bills for Windsor Great Park’.

⁶⁶ Royal Archives: CP vol 79/30, 46, 62, 90.

⁶⁷ Information from the Lucas-Scudamore family, Kentchurch Court.

⁶⁸ Paper on apple pests read to the Horticultural Society, 4 April 1815.

Conclusion

For much of the eighteenth century the name Greening was woven through the history of the development and maintenance of royal gardens. At the height of their success they were at the pinnacle of their profession, known personally by the king and feted by noble patrons. This position was achieved through a successful family network, a multi-faceted business, and aristocratic and royal patronage that was likely to have been carefully cultivated. Two generations of the family – Thomas senior and to a lesser extent his sons, Thomas junior, Robert, and John – would also have worked with the foremost gardeners of the day, especially Charles Bridgeman and William Kent.

A combination of factors in the late 1750s and early 1760s – a new king, the deaths of a number of key family members and rise of the ambitious Lancelot Brown – curtailed their work and eclipsed their reputation. However, in the early 1760s Henry Thomas Greening appears to have taken up his uncle Robert's mantle and was working for the Duke of Cumberland in Windsor Great Park. Though less well known, the scale of the projects here outstripped those of his mother Queen Caroline at Richmond in the 1720s and 1730s and his brother, Prince Frederic, and sister-in-law Princess Augusta, at Kew from the 1740s. Not enough is yet understood of the Greening involvement and significance in the works at Windsor for Cumberland; the importance of both the Greening family and the scale of the works warrants further study. This aside, their descendants demonstrated that the Greening family name had longevity in association with important gardens. Members of the family were still prominent enough to be consulted by Sir Joseph Banks and employed at Frogmore House, Queen Charlotte's Windsor retreat, in the 1790s. Although overshadowed by the reputation of Brown, the importance of the Greening family in the sphere of garden design and horticulture through the eighteenth century should not be overlooked as it helps to contextualise the ascent of Brown and the professional environment of royal and noble networks which he and the Greenings had to navigate.

Select Bibliography

A select bibliography is available at the end of this volume, or at: <https://doi.org/10.22599/CapabilityBrown.o>.