

Associated Colleges of the South
Technology Fellowship Report
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Overview

During the summer of 2005 I scanned over 800 slides of English landscape gardens and stored them, along with other digital images, in a searchable, annotated, web-based database for use in 18th-century English literature courses and art history courses. All but two of the images are my own photographs, taken and compiled over the last twelve years. The result is the English Landscape Gardens Image Collection (ELGIC), which can be found at <http://csunx2.bsc.edu:8080/ELGIC/html/explain.html>.


Background

This project builds on three ongoing projects. First, it serves to complement my Web site on Stowe Landscape Gardens (<http://panther.bsc.edu/~jtatter/stowe.html>), which I have continued to develop since I went on line with it in 1996. The virtual reality panoramas on that site were developed in the summer of 2000 partially funded by a Technology Fellowship. On the Stowe site, the digital images supplement the text that describes the garden features and outlines their history. Accordingly, the images are small and, consequently, not always useable as components of classroom presentations or as visual records to be examined in detail. The ELGIC database, which includes images from Stowe (545 at present) and twenty additional gardens, is intended to serve students and faculty whose research and teaching needs center on images rather than text. In this way it joins two other growing databases housed at Birmingham-Southern with the same function but different subjects: “The Classics Images Collection” (<http://csunx2.bsc.edu/CIC>) created by Samuel J. Pezzillo and partially funded by a Technology Fellowship in spring 2001, and “Images of the English Medieval Cathedral and City” (<http://csunx2.bsc.edu:8080/IEMCC>) created by Susan K. Hagen and partially funded by a Technology Fellowship in summer 2003. Like these two collections, mine is hosted by the computer science discipline at the College in a database that allows queries, textual descriptions, and thumbnail examples.

Methodology

After using ACS funds to purchase a good slide scanner (Konica Minolta’s DiIMAGE Scan Elite 5400 II) that came with software which automatically removes scratches and dust from the images, I went through my collection of approximately 1100 slides and re-scanned over 800 of them at a higher resolution (2400 x 1600 pixels as compared 400 x 250 pixels). After scanning, using Adobe Photoshop I manipulated the images as necessary, mostly cropping and rotating slightly for aesthetic purposes as well as correcting for brightness and contrast. I then resized each image to a standard size of 1200 x 800 pixels for use in the database. This size fills a typical laptop screen, and it can be reduced as necessary for use in a variety of print or electronic formats.

The database operates on two parallel series of files, a series of images and a series of html files that contain the identifying text. The files are parallel in that each pair has the same title but different file extensions (.html and .jpg). When a user posts a query containing any word in the html file of identifying text, the text file comes up in the left-hand column of a table and a thumbnail version of the image comes up in the right-hand column. The user may then click on the thumbnail in order to see the full-size image on a subsequent screen. An example of an entry appears below.

<p>Location: Stowe Landscape Gardens: Hawkwell Field Subject: The Palladian Bridge from the north, cattle grazing in Hawkwell Field Image title: stowe147s.jpg Image size: 1200 x 800; 648 KB Original image: color transparency, July 1997 Copyright holder: John D. Tatter</p>	
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One of the most important decisions I had to make in the above process concerned the format of the identifying text. Professor Hagen in her database chose to be more descriptive about the subject matter of her images, and Professor Pezzillo took a more minimalist approach by simply identifying the subject. Because I expect the ELGIC database to be used by those who are familiar with landscape gardens, I chose a middle ground, using text that identifies orientation within the landscape and, in certain cases, time of day. A line denoting the type and date of the original image also denotes the month and year, which are helpful in identifying the season and the point in time during the process of developing or restoring a landscape feature.

Assessment

The ELGIC database is now available online for research and instructional use. I am in the process of contacting my colleagues at sister institutions for their feedback, particularly as they consider the database for use in research and teaching. One piece of information I am particularly interested in is whether my colleagues think that I should add a piece of information in each html file that identifies the landscape architect, the building architect, or the sculptor. A student might wish, for example, to search the database for garden buildings designed by William Kent or Sir John Vanbrugh, and without those architects' names included in the identifying information such a search is not yet possible.

I am also asking for feedback on additional gardens or garden features to include in the database as it expands. In the short term, I will be spending the month of October in England, working on my sabbatical project at Stowe, and I expect to take more digital images there as well as to visit other gardens.

9/15/05