

Capability Brown in Dorset

CB 300 Festival Background



Lancelot 'Capability' Brown changed the face of eighteenth century England, designing country estates and mansions, moving hills and making flowing lakes and serpentine rivers, a magical world of green

2016 marks the 300th anniversary of the birth of Lancelot 'Capability' Brown, a designer who changed the national landscape and created a style which has shaped people's picture of the quintessential English countryside. As the first ever celebration of Brown's extensive works, the Capability Brown Festival 2016 brings together a huge range of events, openings and exhibitions running between March and October. New research and a full listing of his sites will help build knowledge about Brown and fix him at the

forefront of modern thinking on design and management of the natural environment.

Brown's sites will be made accessible for families, adults and urban audiences, and volunteers supported to increase their skills in site interpretation, guiding and writing. Artist, inventor, genius; Brown's work has already influenced many at home and abroad. The Festival will inspire new generations of visitors, participants and experts to leave a legacy of new information, skills and enthusiasm for landscape.

Brown's style derived from the two practical principles of comfort and elegance. On the one hand, there was a determination that everything should work, and that a landscape should provide for every need of the great house. On the other, his landscapes had to cohere and look elegant.

While his designs have great variety, they also appear seamless owing to his use of the sunk fence or 'ha-ha' to confuse the eye into believing that different pieces of parkland, though managed and stocked quite differently, were one. His expansive lakes, at different levels and apparently unconnected, formed a single body of water as if a river through the landscape, that like the parkland itself, ran on indefinitely.

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Lancelot Brown was baptised on 30 Aug 1716 at Kirkharle, Northumberland, the fifth of the six children of William Brown, a yeoman farmer and Ursula, née Hall, who had worked in the big house on the Kirkharle estate. He went to the village school at Cambo, and then began work as a gardener at Kirkharle, leaving in 1739.

In 1741 he reached Stowe, Buckinghamshire where he rapidly assumed responsibility for the execution of both architectural and landscaping works in the famous garden. It was at Stowe in 1744 that Brown married Bridget Wayet, with whom he eventually had nine children.

While at Stowe, Brown also began working as an independent designer and contractor and in autumn 1751, he was able to move with his family to the Mall, Hammersmith, the market garden area of London.

His vast range of 250 projects included Blenheim, Chatsworth, Harewood, Longleat, Petworth., Syon and Broadlands.

He also practiced architecture, and during the 1750s contributed to several country houses, including Burghley House, Northants. However his architecture played second fiddle to his 'place-making'. In 1764 he was appointed to the gardens of Hampton Court, Richmond and St James and he then moved to Wilderness House, Hampton Court. He continued to work and travel until his sudden collapse and death on 6th February 1783.

He died at his daughter Bridget Holland's house in London, but was buried at Fenstanton, in Cambridgeshire, the only place he is known to have owned property and where he became Lord of the Manor.

www.capabilitybrown.org/



Capability Brown at Milton Abbey

St Catherine's Chapel, Milton Abbey, Lord Milton's mansion, and the village of Milton Abbas are embraced and integrated by a breathtaking 500 acre landscape designed by Capability Brown, which began in 1763 and continued up to Brown's death in 1783.

Three valleys converge, and inside one of the valleys is the village of Milton Abbas, contained either side by a silhouette of trees on top of the hillsides. This picturesque 'lost village' in a wooded valley is the first 'new town' in England. Milton Abbey is at the focal point of the converging valleys, encircled by 16 miles of walks, rides, and carriage drives designed to draw the visitor through the space, enriched en route by features such as the folly - called the Sham Chapel - built by Brown and William Chambers. Everywhere there are glimpses and vistas opening up to the Abbey as the route is travelled. This sublime landscape is one of the finest examples of the work of Capability Brown in England.

The 18th century English writer on agriculture and economics, Arthur Young, visited Milton Abbey in 1771 and was overwhelmed by the stupendous reach of grass and woods on the north side of Damer's new mansion - 'a remarkable winding valley three miles long, surrounded on each side by hills whose variety is very great. It is all lawn; and as the surface has many fine swells and other gentle inequalities, the effect is everywhere beautiful. The hills on the west side are thickly covered with wood, from the edge of the vale, spreading over the tops of the hills; these continued sweeps of hanging woods are very noble. In some places they form projections that break forward in great style; in others they withdraw and open bosoms of wood which are as picturesque as can easily be imagined'. He noted that 'All the home grounds are to be walled in, which will be a circuit of 16 miles, half of which are done; and the tops of the hills all planted with a great variety of trees to the amount of 500 acres.'

Ecologists today press for the need for a wider range of landscape, an integration of landscape and nature, a connectedness of things. This is what Brown was able to design for Damer at Milton. His client was 'one of the most considerable farmers in this country, and the home grounds were a farm with about 1,400 sheep, not so much with a view to profit as the beauty of his lawns.' The parkland has become indistinguishable from the farm, the landscape sprawls lavishly over the ground without regard to boundaries, public roads or property. A lake was created at the southern end of the estate adjoining the village of Milton Abbas, winding its way towards the Abbey. Due to a series of technical and legal problems, the lake never reached the Abbey, but it remains an enchanting part of the whole composition.

www.miltonabbey.org/





Milton Abbas village designed by Brown



Brown expert, John Phibbs, shows cameraman, Tony Shearn, the Delcombe Valley



The Abbey from the lake



The Abbey from St Catherine's Chapel



The valley leading to Hilton village



Whilst on a recent visit to Blandford Forum, Alan Titchmarsh was shown photographs of the Capability Brown landscape at Milton Abbey. Commenting on the images, he said "How wonderful to have such a glorious landscape on your doorstep, and to have people who are prepared to champion it and share it with others. This is

Lancelot 'Capability' Brown at his matchless best".



The folly designed by Brown and Chambers

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© Portrait of Lancelot 'Capability' Brown, c.1770-75.
Cosway, Richard (1742-1821)
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