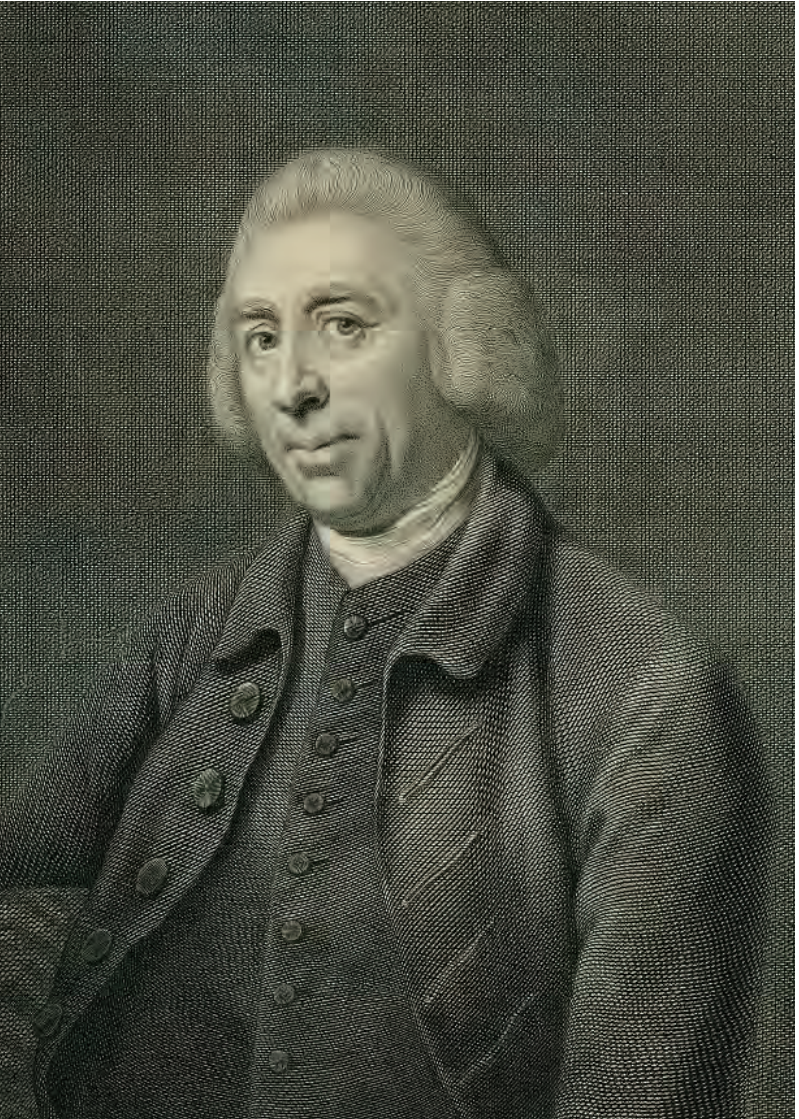
‘Capability’ Brown & The Landscapes of Middle England

Compton Verney



Introduction (Room 1)

Lancelot 'Capability' Brown was born in 1716 in the Northumbrian hamlet of Kirkharle to a family of yeoman-farmers. The local landowner, Sir William Loraine, granted him his first gardening job at Kirkharle Hall in 1732. Demonstrating his enduring capacity for attracting aristocratic patrons, by the time he was twenty-five Viscount Cobham had promoted him to the position of Head Gardener at Stowe. Brown then secured a number of lucrative commissions in the Midlands: Newnham Paddox, Great Packington, Charlecote Park (**Room 3**) and Warwick Castle in Warwickshire, Croome Court in Worcestershire (**Room 3**), Weston Park in Staffordshire (**Room 3**) and Castle Ashby in Northamptonshire. The English landscape designer Humphry Repton later commented that this rapid success was attributable to a 'natural quickness of perception and his habitual correctness of observation'.

On 22 November 1744 Brown married Bridget Wayet. They had a daughter and three sons: Bridget, Lancelot, William and John. And in 1751 Brown set himself up as architect and landscape consultant in Hammersmith, west of London, beginning a relentlessly demanding career that would span thirty years and encompass over 170 estates.

In 1764, coinciding directly with his newly elevated position of Royal Gardener to George III, Brown embarked on several illustrious commissions, including Blenheim Palace, Oxfordshire, and Luton Hoo in Bedfordshire. He then took on as business partner the successful builder-architect Henry Holland the Younger. Two years later, in 1773, Holland married Brown's daughter Bridget, thus cementing the relationship between the two families.

John Keyse Sherwin, after Nathaniel Dance, *Lancelot Brown (Prof Tim Mowl)*

As the fashion for landscapes designed in 'the Park way' increased in popularity, employment opportunities at England's greatest estates opened up in swift succession. Throughout the 1760s and 1770s Brown worked at Chatsworth, Compton Verney, Weston Park, Corsham Court, Alnwick Castle, Syon House, Holkham and Wilton – to name just a few.

Brown spent the last sixteen years of his life at his own small estate, Fenstanton Manor in Huntingdonshire, purchased in 1767. By the time he died in 1783 he had amassed significant wealth, and joined the landowning classes he had dedicated his life to serving. He is buried at the Church of St Peter and St Paul in his home parish of Fenstanton.

Shaping the Landscape (Room 1)

The phenomenal success of Brown's landscaping consultancy was the combined result of four attributes: ruthless efficiency, the ability to reconcile the economic needs of the Georgian upper classes within an aesthetically pleasing estate, and a proficient grasp of practical gardening and surveying techniques. Brown was skilled in all aspects of drainage, dam-building, levelling and earth-moving, and could identify the individual 'capabilities' of an existing garden within an hour on horseback.

Brown charged ten guineas for this initial visit, where the estate's topography would be carefully considered. He then dispatched assistant surveyors such as John Spyers and Samuel Lapidge to produce a survey of the land. As each commission took an average of five years to complete, a trusted foreman was stationed on site to oversee a team of under-gardeners. (Amongst Brown's favourite agents were Andrew Gardiner, Alexander Knox and William Ireland.) Yet despite this strict on-site hierarchy, problems did occur. 'When I am galloping in one part of the world my men are making blunders and neglects', he apologised at one point to Lord Bruce.

Paying regular visits to each estate, Brown personally checked on the advancement of his landscaping schemes and took detailed 'minutes' which were used to instruct his men further. Regarding the progress of the ha-ha at Burton Constable, Brown wrote on 4 September 1773: 'Take away Park Pale dividing Bacchus Field from the Park. Remake a Sunk Fence about 40 or 50 Yards North of the Pale Fence; and lead this into the new Sunk Fence round the House.'

The agricultural revolution of the second half of the century ushered in new machinery which facilitated the creation of smooth turf and the transplanting of mature trees within a fledgling landscape park. Likewise, the increased reclamation of common lands and arable fields into existing estates brought landowners further profit, as they reaped the rewards of rising rents.

Brown and Architecture (Room 1)

The many good houses built under his direction, prove him to have been no mean proficient in an art, the practice of which he found, from experience, to be inseparable from landscape gardening.
John Claudius Loudon, 1840

I am uniformly of the opinion, that where a place is to be formed, he who disposes the ground and arranges the plantations ought to fix the situation at least, if not to determine the shape and size of the ornamental buildings. Brown, I know, was ridiculed for turning architect, but I always thought he did from a kind of necessity having found the great difficulty which must frequently have occurred to him in forming a picturesque whole, where the previous building had been ill-placed, or of improper dimentions.
William Mason, letter to Humphry Repton in Sketches & Hints, 1795

In 'Capability' Brown's landscapes, the main or 'parent' house was an integral part of his carefully-composed landscape. On occasions Brown himself was commissioned to produce designs for a new house, one which would complement his horticulture and small garden buildings. Much of Brown's architectural work was executed by Henry Holland, a master builder from Fulham (d. 1785), and later by Holland's eldest son, also Henry (1745–1806). In 1771 Brown went into an informal partnership with the younger Holland, handing over to him the architectural side of his practice – and in 1773 Holland married Brown's daughter, Bridget.

Brown's early designs for houses and related buildings (such as the Compton Verney Chapel) were stolidly Palladian in style, while his garden buildings were often Gothick. Brown worked alongside several architects in addition to Holland when producing his landscape designs – most notably Robert Adam (1728–1792) and James Paine (1717–1789).

Blenheim Palace, Oxfordshire
Brown's Rococo-Gothick designs for a bath house for Rosamond's Bower were never carried out, but he remodelled High Lodge and Park Farm in Gothick style. A grand scheme for Gothicising all the walls to the east of the Palace, in order to hide the grounds from the prying eyes of the Woodstock townsfolk, was also never executed but survives in a beautifully coloured drawing.

Compton Verney, Warwickshire
The architectural features at Compton Verney (**Room 4**) are difficult to attribute. The Ice House, Chapel and Greenhouse (the latter sadly demolished in the 1950s) were by Brown, but both bridges are of uncertain provenance – they could be by either Adam or Brown. In the accounts there is a bill 'For Building a Pavelion - or Seate on the Broad Walk at Compton' dated between June 28 and August 30 1788; this is likely to be the small Doric Temple on the hillside which overlooked the lake and the house, and is obviously a later project. It might, however, have always formed part of his plan. The Upper ('Sphinx') Bridge dates from 1770–72.

Brown certainly designed the Chapel for the 6th Lord Willoughby de Broke; it was built between 1776 and 1778.

Combe Abbey, Warwickshire
Brown designed the parkland at Combe (**Room 3**), but Henry Holland junior probably designed its most poetic building: the Menagerie. However, the park originally had a Gothick Kennels and a Gothick Lodge, and these may have been by Brown.

Newnham Paddox, Warwickshire
Brown rebuilt the house at Newnham Paddox for the 5th and 6th Earls of Denbigh between 1754 and 1768. It was tragically demolished in 1952.

Like his contemporary design for Croome, the house owed much to the towered Palladian house that Sanderson Miller designed at Hagley.

William Fielding, the 5th Earl of Denbigh, and his wife Isabella were close friends of Lord Cobham in London. Returning to England in 1741 they began major improvements, inspired perhaps by Cobham's new landscape at Stowe in Buckinghamshire. In 1746 alterations began to the great canal, 'carrying it on to the head of the Pond in the Park by a Plan and the direction of Mr Brown, Gardiner to Lord Cobham' – Brown having been formally loaned to the Denbighs from Stowe. Two rectangular ponds from the old formal gardens were reshaped into two irregular lakes, seen from the house's main elevation.

In 1753 Brown was requested to rebuild the house, and in April the workmen 'Began to pull down part of the old House', ready for the building of Brown's new facade. The 5th Earl died in 1755, but work on the house continued under his son Basil until 1761. Brown was not paid, though, until 18 May 1768 – 'Mr Lancelot Brown' paid £200 'for Measuring, Surveying, Planning' in connection with 'the Building of the House at Newnham'.

Weston Park, Staffordshire
While Brown was responsible for the parkland, which was remodelled closely to his design, his intended Menagerie at Weston Park was never built. The only garden building of significance at Weston is the Temple of Diana, which was designed by James Paine (**Room 3**).

Castle Ashby, Northamptonshire
The 7th Earl of Northampton had met Robert Adam on the Grand Tour in 1757–8, and soon after invited both Adam and Brown to prepare schemes for new landscaping at his Northamptonshire seat. Adam's plan was for 'Laying out the Pleasure Ground, redesigning the Kitchen Garden and providing a 'Small Park for Deer'. He advocated the sweeping away of all tree avenues except the Grand Avenue and the grassing over of the eastern garden area of the 4th Earl's formal parterres. To improve the eastern prospects from the house, the canals in the declivity south and east were to be naturalised into three connected serpentine lakes connected by cascades and a bridge. The park was to be opened up by the removal of existing boundary fences, tree clumps were to be scattered about, principally east of the house, and on the other side of the lakes a Menagerie was proposed.

Brown's plan – partly carried out before the 7th Earl's death in Naples from consumption in 1763, and continued for Spencer, the 8th Earl, before he left for Switzerland in 1774 – followed roughly the same approach. Under the estate foreman, John Midgley, the north and west avenues were felled, but the eastern tree avenue was retained and he broke up the formality of the Grand Avenue by taking trees away and clumping others. Brown's treatment of the eastern valley below the house mirrored Adam's, though his planting around the northern reaches of the lake was dense rather than clumped. The Menagerie (**Room 3**) is on the same site as that proposed by Adam and conforms to the ground plan on the Adam map, so it is safe to attribute it to him rather than to Brown. It is an intensely lyrical building with a central shallow dome projecting on Doric columns in an ellipse between wings with recessed windows. It conceals keeper's accommodation to the rear.

Croome Court, Worcestershire
In 1751–2 Brown was commissioned to design the house as well as the

parkland at Croome (**Room 3**), and opted for a towered Palladian house based closely on Sanderson Miller's design for Hagley Hall in Worcestershire. Croome's owner, Lord Coventry, wrote to Miller to say that 'whatever merits [Croome] may in future time boast it will be ungrateful not to acknowledge you the primary Author'. Brown also designed the Stables, the Church (built between 1758 and 1763, with an interior by Robert Adam), the Rotunda (of 1754–7, and sited at the end of the Home Shrubbery) and the Grotto at Croome.

Of the other significant garden buildings dating from this period at Croome, the serene Temple Greenhouse of 1760 and mock medieval Dunstall Castle of 1765, were both designed by Adam, as too was the Park Seat or Alcove (1766), sometimes referred to as the Owl's Nest. Adam also devised a palatial Menagerie, which was unexecuted; a more modest building was constructed in 1768. The Chinese Bridge across the lake was designed by William Halfpenny (died 1755), while Brown himself was responsible for the Dry Arch Bridge. In a later phase of landscaping, carried out by James Wyatt between 1792 and 1805, several new buildings were sited further out in the landscape. These included the Panorama Tower on Knight's Hill to the west, Pirton Castle, a sham ruin, on the Cedar Belt to the north-west, and a Gothick Keeper's Tower beyond Dunstall Castle to the south.

The Sporting Landscape (Room 2)

Brown's landscape park exploited the Georgian love of hunting, shooting and fishing. His carefully planted belts and copses provided cover for game birds, and lakes could be used for fishing and boating. Wherever possible, Brown amalgamated existing water features into naturalistic lakes and salvaged woodland for use within clumps. As a result, his landscape minimalism effortlessly accommodated the economic and sporting needs of a landowner within an aesthetically pleasing estate. A series of Game Acts of 1707, 1723 and 1755, revolutionised hunting and ensured that shooting birds remained a privileged pastime to be enjoyed only by the landed rich. Poaching was, therefore, punishable by hanging, and only free-holders pertaining to 'a higher degree' of social class were entitled to shoot.

As the century progressed, guns became lighter and consequently more accurate, with barrel length decreasing rapidly. The bow-and-arrow was completely discarded and men sought increasing challenges in the field with their new lead shot. The subsequent replacement of the matchlock with the flintlock led one hunter to complain that guns had become so effective, 'few Fowls escape'.

More testing competitions were encouraged by the 1770 publication of *The Art of Shooting Flying*. Pheasants preferred to roost within the copses and clumps of a landscape park and flew high, providing gentlemen with a moving target. Landowners were soon releasing large numbers of birds onto their estates for the express purpose of shooting them down again. John Byng, visiting Blenheim in 1787, remarked that here were 'hatched and reared such quantities of pheasants that I almost trod upon them in the grass'.

Viewing the Landscape (Room 2)

Carriages, like the modern motor car, have inspired both admiration and displeasure. By the 1750s, a private carriage with horses and liveried coachman was a coveted and highly taxed emblem of wealth and status. Yet unsophisticated carriage springs and eighteenth-century rutted roads also combined to induce a form of motion sickness that was so prevalent amongst passengers it became known as 'coaching.'

By the middle of the century improvements in technology were allowing Edmund Burke to suggest that coach travel was a pleasurable, even a beautiful diversion. Burke's treatise A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origins of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful of 1757 suggested that

> Another principal property of a beautiful object is, that the line of their parts is continually varying its direction; but it varies it by a very insensible deviation; it never varies it so quickly as to surprise, or by the sharpness of its angle to cause any twitching or convulsion of the optic nerve…..there is a species of motion which relaxes more than rest; a gentle oscillatory motion, a rising and falling. Rocking sets children to sleep better than absolute rest…Most people…must have observed the sort of sense they have had of being swiftly drawn in an easy coach on a smooth turf, with gradual accents and declivities.

This was one way in which excursions into the countryside came to be seen as a seductive escape from the controlled environment of the country house offering freedom to young ladies such as Elizabeth Iremonger (writing in 1786) to enjoy the countryside's 'peculiar Charms':

> there is nothing like it and I am always sorry to quit it. We enjoyed the few hot Days and evenings during the Last Moon very much; my Aunt and I frequently drove in the Harvest-fields by moonlight, in an open Carriage, and supped at our return by the same light, without Candles. Perhaps you did not suspect I was such a Lunatick.

The thrill of travelling through a Brownian landscape was relished by estate owners, and valued for its ability to impress guests and the growing band of eighteenth-century garden visitors. William Mavor's 1817 guidebook to the park at Blenheim Palace explained Brown's changing sequence of landscape compositions to the casual tourist, revealing the cinematic qualities of a drive:

> …through the forest wood, which lies between [High Lodge] and the lake, [and] presents such an assemblage of views, and such various combinations of them in rapid succession, that no stranger should omit taking this route. The water, the Palace, the Gardens, the Great Bridge, the Pillar, Woodstock, and other near and remote objects, open and shut upon the eye like enchantment; and at one point, every change of a few paces furnishes a new scene, each of which would form a subject worthy of the sublimest pencil.

A similar effect was, Mavor observed, to be found at Croome Court, with its

> delightful ride, skirting the entire bounds of the domain…in a wide circuit of ten miles: interspersed by several collateral branches, affording other rides, of pleasing variety, and different distances… The principal ride is sheltered and adorned by fine and flourishing trees, scattered about, or clustered together: and, on the other side, charming prospects open, in passing, over the park….The deep and

> solemn shade of the woods, through which the ride is occasionally conducted, agreeably change, at times, and relieve the scene.

At Alnwick Castle, the Duke and Duchess of Northumberland wanted to appreciate their developing Brownian landscape from the calm of a sailing boat, and dreamed of a vessel called the *Esperance*, whose name echoed the battle cry of the Duchess' Percy ancestors. In the summer of 1771 they invited the canal engineer, James Brindley, to advise on the construction of the new lake, but severe winter flooding swept away the early work and doused the couple's yearning for more lakes. Instead they confined their new 'sailing boat…built as a pleasure craft' to an existing stretch of water on the River Aln, below the Castle.

Such experiences show that Brown's landscapes were designed as a sequence of pictures that darted into view from a speeding carriage or languidly held the eye from a drifting boat. They were never static, and they were enjoyed in a variety of ways that are denied to today's visitor.

Planting the Landscape (Room 2)

A Brown landscape is best recognised through its use of planting in the form of pasture, enlivened with tree clumps, perimeter shelterbelts and screens of trees. Brown is often credited with sweeping away the formal parterres and avenues of a previous age, but he also planted thousands of trees, predominantly oaks, ash and elms.

Trees take time to mature, so in order that his designs could be appreciated during his patrons' lifetimes, Brown also invented a tree-moving machine to transplant mature specimens. The resultant landscape is recognisably English parkland, and was perfectly designed to encourage those eighteenth-century pursuits of hunting and shooting.

Although Brown's minimalist design aesthetic was fashionable there was criticism of this type of planting. In 1772, the architect William Chambers stated that 'whole woods have been swept away to make room for a little grass and a few American weeds. Our virtuosi have scarcely left an acre of shade, nor three trees growing in a line, from Land's End to the Tweed, and if their humour for devastation continues to rage much longer there will not be a forest-tree left standing in the whole Kingdom.' In reality, however, it appears that Brown actually planted thousands of new trees when creating his shelter belts and clumps.

Brown planted dextrously so that dark evergreens would be used as a backdrop to highlight temples and other garden buildings, while an alternate use of evergreens and deciduous planting would allow for changes of mood as a visitor walked along paths that threaded through the woodland. He also contrived glimpses of lakes and buildings through consciously planned openings between trees and shrubs. These effects were noted and applauded in the following 1800 description of Fisherwick, Staffordshire:

> The light green turf, of the most glossy smoothness, stretching away on each side to the edge of the lake, forms pleasing contrast with the deep green umbrage of the o'er shading shrubs...Our walk runs occasionally among lofty trees which obscure the views, and again abruptly discover the polished surface of the lake...The still serenity of this beautiful lake, heightened by the solemn umbrage of majestic trees on either side, terminated by a light elegant bridge, and backed by a thick wood, entirely excluding all other objects, has a most

> sublime effect... our walk now leads on through knots of evergreens, o'ershadow'd by lofty firs and oaks, carried down the slope of a beautiful natural TERRAS to the stream on our right. As our course winds along this charming slope, the scenes become more open with shrubs and trees fantastically disposed and dropped with the most graceful negligence over the verdant declivity….a devious course, thickly shaded with ever-green and shrubs, till we reach a small lawn, every way embosomed with closely planted trees, except on the north, where, beneath the opening boughs we discover the smooth expanse of the Lake.

Another function of the planting was the screening of buildings so that they would not all be seen at once and would, instead, be revealed at set locations as a visitor walked or rode around the landscape. At Croome, Adam's Island Temple of 1776–8 was very carefully masked by yews so that it was not visible until the bridge was crossed.

One of Brown's signature planting styles was clumps of trees set within the parkland. These allowed the framing of elements such as lakes and replaced the more geometrically designed formal avenues of earlier periods. At Warwick Castle the 'Family Clump' had special significance, as the trees were used to represent individual members of Lord Brooke's family. There are also extensive records at the Castle of the type of trees purchased. Lord Brooke bought 'Poppler sett' at 2½d each from a Mr Webb; a nursery had also been created behind the lodge in 1749; and semi-mature trees were also transplanted, as payment was given 'for filling holes where trees were taken to plant in the garden'. Nurserymens' bills of ten years later show that Brown was using native oaks and elms in the park, but with a high proportion of evergreens, such as cedar of Lebanon and Scots pine, in the garden area.

Brown at Combe Abbey, Warwickshire, 1770-74 (Room 3)

John Harrington rebuilt Combe Abbey, a former monastery, into a sizeable country house in the 1660s (37). He developed formal gardens and, as guardian to Princess Elizabeth Stuart from 1603 to 1608, constructed small decorative buildings and a wilderness to please her. In 1682–9 William Winde made alterations to Combe for Sir William Craven, and modifications were made to the formal gardens, as seen in the 1707 engraving by Kip and Knyff

William, 6th Baron Craven (who inherited in 1769), commissioned Brown in *c.*1770 to improve these gardens and to construct buildings in the park, including lodges, kennels and a menagerie to Brown's design (or possibly that of his son-in-law, Henry Holland). In the summer of 1770 Lord Craven wrote to Brown that, although he was detained in London, he requested Brown to proceed to Combe: 'All that I have further to observe, is that you to exert yr. utmost abilities to improve the place … I hope you will not leave Combe till you have made a plan and estimate...' Work had commenced by September 1771, with payments being made until May 1774.

Maria Johnson's 1797 watercolours of Combe depict the garden buildings that were designed by Brown or Holland. The Gothick East Lodge, with ogee-headed arched windows and mock arrow-slits, exists today with two later wings, but the delightfully-castellated Gothick Dog Kennels were demolished by 1886.

Brown's serpentine lake, giving a view of a mile of water from the Abbey, was centrally aligned on the west front of the house. Brown made allowances for the flat landscape, planting only one clump amidst the

scattering of trees. Matthias Baker's survey of 1778 clearly shows the smooth banks of the lake, enabling views both towards the west, and back to the house. Where the lake doubles-back around an island created by Brown, an eye-catcher – a stone Menagerie with an octagonal tower and a leaded dome – was constructed in the 1770s to Brown's design, to house rare and exotic animals.

Brown at Charlecote Park, Warwickshire, 1757–1762 (Room 3)

Charlecote's formal landscape, created in the 1680s and 1690s, featured parterres near the house and a seventeenth-century Dutch water garden with an octagonal summerhouse, sited on a narrow strip of land between brick-lined canals.

George Lucy inherited Charlecote in 1744, and after a visit to Italy, set about improving the gardens and park. He contacted Brown – possibly through his friend Lady Coventry of Snitterfield, who had family connections to Croome. Brown drew a rough plan of Charlecote in about 1750, and visited the site to advise on the widening of the Wellesbourne Brook. However, he was not formally engaged until 1757, when a cascade was built on the Brook to the south-west of the house. When it was completed by March 1761, Lucy wrote from Bath: 'pray how doth the Cascade look now it is finished?'

In 1760 George Lucy entered into a contract with Brown for works which included the destruction of the now unfashionable water garden, creating a wilderness and ha-ha in their place. The River Avon was widened, with the banks smoothed to give them a 'natural and easy level', and a raised cedar lawn, six feet above the level of the courtyard, replaced the seventeenth-century bowling green. Brown agreed to source all the trees, replant any that might die, and sow all the improved ground with grass-seed and Dutch clover.

Brown was in such demand that work at Charlecote did not run smoothly. Lucy reported from Bath in March 1761 that 'Mr. Browne, who everyone wants, hath not yet made his appearance here'. In April 1761 Lucy was waiting for his Gainsborough portrait to be delivered, and also still waiting for Brown: 'Mr. Brown was here on Sunday last, and staid till Tuesday, when he called upon me... and told me he should not be at Charlecote till May, which I suppose will be June at the soonest'. However, in 1762 Brown told Lucy that the additional trees ordered would be planted and that all the new work completed – 'you may depend that everything shall be put to right'.

Brown at Croome Court, Worcestershire, 1751–83 (Room 3)

In 1744 Thomas, the 23-year-old Viscount Deerhurst, heir to the Croome estates in Worcestershire, died suddenly from an unidentified illness. When his father also died four years later his brother, George William (1722–1809), became the 6th Earl of Coventry. George filled the role confidently, attracting some of the most talented architects, designers and craftsmen to improve and embellish the family estate. He began cautiously, seeking the advice of a close university friend, the gentleman architect Sanderson Miller, and experimenting with his own changes to the landscape. It was almost certainly Miller who introduced Lord Coventry to Brown, and in so doing acquainted Brown with a landscape that was still in his care when he died in 1783.

Brown began work at Croome in 1751, and soon made an impression both as the architect and the clerk of works of the new Palladian house. Costs were controlled as he challenged invoices such as that submitted by Henry Holland Senior, the father of Brown's future son-in-law.

Brown's skills, both as an architect and a landscape improver, made for a very cohesive park. He sited his new church (under construction by 1758) in a stunning position on the ridge above the house, whilst his Rotunda, erected between 1754 and 1757, afforded magical glimpses of other eye-catchers from its windows. In 1765 his Dry Arch Bridge (shortly to be rebuilt and decorated by James Wyatt) and his Grotto (soon to be embellished with crystals and a reclining statue of Sabrina) were also taking shape.

Brown possessed the personality to foster a lasting relationship with his client. He adapted Lord Coventry's own failed attempts at water management to create the impressive (if deceptively-titled) 'Croome River'. Brown's recognised skill with water management was such that his final task on the estate was to design a half-mile drain to bring water into the pleasure grounds and to raise the drought-induced and unsightly low water level of his lake. He also contributed to the estate's infrastructure diverting the road away from the new house and possibly selecting the location for a new cluster of cottages almost hidden from view in a shallow valley in a landscape that is generally remarkable for its flatness.

The great glory of Brown's work at Croome is the trees – particularly the cedars. As with many of his landscapes, there is no definitive evidence of his role in planting; indeed all of the plant invoices were authorised by the Earl. Instead, there are a series of unspecific receipts from Brown that span the years from 1760 to 1779, and provide the key to his working methods. Documenting a series of annual payments of between £50 and £100 for 'all demands on me', they show an architect and designer with the skill and knowledge to take responsibility for the maintenance of his ideas.

Brown at Weston Park, Staffordshire, 1765–8 (Room 3)

In 1762 Sir Henry Bridgeman (1725–1800) inherited Weston from an uncle and soon began to improve the house and estate, which had been neglected for some time. His wife was Elizabeth Simpson, whose main family home, Stoke Hall in Derbyshire, was near Chatsworth, where Brown had been employed in 1761. It was probably through this contact that Sir Henry soon engaged Brown in 1765 to modernise the landscape near the house, probably removing old formal features. Brown's two contracts (of September 1765, for £765, and July 1766, for £952) specified the creation of a walled ha-ha to separate the existing deer park from his new pleasure grounds with trees, shrubs and walks to the north-west and east of the house. For this work, Sir Henry was to provide horses, carts and wheelbarrows, and also the trees and shrubs.

Obviously encouraged by these new features, Sir Henry continued to embellish the landscape. In 1768 James Paine was commissioned to design a greenhouse, to be sited near Brown's ha-ha as a focal point to be seen from the house and park. Paine appears to have worked for Lady Bridgeman's father, the Reverend John Simpson, at Stoke Hall, so the commission no doubt came from this connection. Paine exhibited his design at the Society of Artists in 1770. The building had an

octagonal tea-room to the rear and a music room, and was soon being called 'The Temple of Diana'.

Sir Henry used his own men to continue improvements. Fountain Pool was enlarged and made into the larger 'Temple Pool.' The accounts include expenses for 'a seat made to stand round the ash tree at the Fountain Pool' (October 1768). Then, in January 1770, came the item 'one man making the model for the Bridge over the Fountain Pool.' This was the classical 'Roman' bridge, designed by Paine, which crosses a small stream behind the Temple of Diana, and which overlooks Temple Pool, the small lake formed from Fountain Pool between 1770 and 1793. The main approach from the Lichfield Lodge was made to cross over this bridge, and presented the visitor with a view to the Temple before the house was reached.

Brown at Compton Verney, Warwickshire, 1768–1779 (Room 4)

The seventeenth-century landscape in Wencelas Hollar's 1656 Prospect of *Compton House* portrays the house and medieval church overlooking an extensive mill pool. Parkland and orchards surround the site with a possible viewing mount east of the Kineton to Stratford road.

George, 12th Baron Willoughby de Broke, inherited the estate in 1711, and reconstructed the house and garden. He created extensive formal gardens with an ornamental canal near to the house, a geometric pattern shrubbery, avenues radiating out from the house, and a series of lakes formed from the mill pool.

The 14th Baron, John Peyto Verney (who inherited in 1752) had, by 1760, received two inheritances which enabled him to make sweeping changes to the house and landscape, coinciding with his proposed marriage in 1761 to Louisa, the sister of Lord North from nearby Wroxton. Verney engaged Robert Adam to remodel the house, from 1762 until 1768, creating a new Hall and adding new wings and a Corinthian portico under the supervision of local stonemason William Hiorn.

Brown is known to have commenced work at Compton Verney in 1768, soon after the reconstruction of the house was completed by Adam. His account book shows that £120 was received on 19 November 1768 after he had visited Compton Verney and provided plans. In 1769 payments were recorded for 'digging the foundations and supplying Warwick sandstone' for a classical greenhouse with Doric columns sited north-west of the house. An unbuilt, undated greenhouse design by Brown has been found in the archives of Ashburnham Place, and was probably used for Compton Verney.

In 1772 the medieval church was demolished, opening up views, and a plain, Palladian-style Chapel built in 1776–9 to Brown's design to the north of the house, for a total cost of £981 10s 4d.

Brown replaced the formal gardens with grassland and trees, and planted the banks of the lakes to soften their outline. A new south drive, which revealed the house to visitors from the bridge, was created by altering an early eighteenth-century formal avenue or walk into a serpentine route. The nearby road was moved for a ha-ha to be created west of the house, and views from the house to the south and west opened up.

An Icehouse was built in 1772, almost certainly to Brown's design. Positioned near the Shrubbery, the final payments in November included 15s 2d to William Harris for thatching the roof. The Shrubbery surrounding the Icehouse once featured geometric walks but, by the time of Padley's 1818 survey, curvilinear paths had been substituted. The were reintroduced in 2008.

Both Adam and Brown worked at Compton Verney at the same time; so which of them provided the designs for the two bridges, the foundations of which were laid in 1770? The Upper Bridge, with its four sphinxes, has been stylistically attributed to Adam, but the design could equally have been Brown's, or a construction by Brown to Adam's design. The existing plans for the Lower Bridge are undated and unsigned, but the 1772 accounts – labelled 'Mr Brown's Work' – record a payment to 'John Maunton, Carpenter' for the work on the Lower Bridge, suggesting a possible Brown attribution.

Large-scale tree planting is in evidence in the 1818 survey, which shows serpentine belts at the western edge of the estate. Payments were made in 1769 and 1772 to Robert Patterson, Nurseryman, for 'trees and shrubbs', and in 1772 to John Maunton for 'Paling the Plantation'. Payments for new trees and shrubs continued throughout the 1770s, with 200 elms being bought on 23 December 1776. By May 1770 work priced at £1000 had been completed by Brown and a new contract begun, which by 1774 totalled £2830 – a princely sum in the late eighteenth century.

Brown's Legacy (Room 4)

I very earnestly wish that I might die before you…because I should like to see heaven before you had improved it.
Richard Owen Cambridge in conversation with Brown; reported by **Sir Uvedale Price**, 1810

In February 1783 Brown was back in London from another visit to Suffolk, where he had been staying with the Duke of Grafton. On 6 February Brown went to call upon his old friend Lord Coventry at his town house in Piccadilly; returning home he had a fit, fell to the ground and died almost instantaneously. He was sixty-seven years old.

In his usual flippant style, Horace Walpole relayed the news of Brown's death to the Countess of Upper Ossory: 'Your dryads must go into black gloves, Madam, their father-in-law, Lady Nature's second husband, is dead!'

Brown's epitaph on his tomb at Fenstanton, near Huntingdon, reads:

> Ye sons of elegance, who truly taste
> The simple charms that genuine art supplies,
> Come from the sylvan scene, his genius grac'd
> And offer here your tributary sighs
> But know that more than genius slumbers here.
> Virtues were his, which arts best powers transcend.
> Come, ye superior train, who these revere
> And weep the Christian, Husband, Father, Friend.

Brown's life had been one continuous journey, taking him the length and breadth of England in the creation of ideal parkscapes for leisure,

profit and sport. At his death no less than 170 estates had been shaped by his personal design, while over 4,000 landscape parks had been created by a new generation of landscapers inspired by him.

Brown's serene parks would become synonymous with the English landscape, despite attacks on him, first by the architect William Chambers, who in 1772 described his landscapes as differing 'very little from common fields, so closely is nature copied in most of them', to even harsher criticism after his death in the 1790s by the Picturesque theorists Richard Payne Knight and Uvedale Price. They took a contrary view calling his parks lifeless and artificial: 'But, wrapt all o'er in everlasting green,/Makes one dull, vapid, smooth, unvaried scene'. Brown's self-styled successor and champion, Humphry Repton, who began his career by designing landscapes in Brown's minimalist style, was soon under pressure to produce the more unkempt and natural-seeming 'Savage Picturesque' landscapes advocated by Payne Knight and Price. At the turn of the new century he abandoned Brown's aesthetic as landscape fashion shifted from the expansive parks of the Picturesque to the 'Gardenesque', a foretaste of suburbia with its fussy flowerbeds and obsession with technology for raising exotics.

But close friends like Lord Coventry thought Brown's fame would last: 'I certainly held him very high as an artist and esteemed him as a most sincere friend. In spite of detraction, his works will ever speak for him… I may be partial to my place at Croome, which was entirely his creation, and, I believe, originally as hopeless a spot as any in the island'. A stone casket in Brown's memory was erected beside the lake at Croome in 1797. The inscription on its pedestal reads: 'To the memory of Lancelot Brown, who by the powers of his inimitable and creative genius formed this garden scene out of a morass'.

Brown was still being praised in the next century. In his *New Description of the grounds at Blenheim* of 1810, George Mavor wrote:

> BROWN possessed an originality of conception, a Poet's eye, and an instinctive taste for rural embellishment….He viewed nature with the enthusiasm of a lover; and though it cannot be denied, that he sometimes tricked her out in meretricious ornaments, and patched her with too refined an art, he never lost sight of her prominent charm; and his worst errors can only be considered as minute pimples on a beautiful face.

In a similar vein, an anonymous pamphleteer of 1800, describing Brown's work at Fisherwick, rightly observed that his 'genius has afforded such proofs of true taste in nature's beauties, as seemed unknown before his time'.

Mr Brown's fame as an architect seems to have been eclipsed by his celebrity as a landscape gardener, he being only professor of one art, while he had many jealous competitors in the other. But when I consider the number of excellent works in architecture designed and executed by him, it becomes an act of justice to his memory to record that, if he was superior to all in what related to his own particular profession, he was inferior to none in what related to the comfort, convenience, taste, and propriety of design in the several mansions and other buildings which he planned.
Humphry Repton, Theory & Practice, 1803

Timeline

1715	**Lancelot Brown born in Kirkhale, Northumberland**
1741–51	Brown working at Stowe, Bucks
1742–6	Wotton, Bucks
1744	**Brown marries Bridget Wayet**
1746–8	**Newnham Paddox, Warks**
1749–57	**Warwick Castle, Warks**
1750s–80s	**Croome Court, Worcs**
1750–1	**Packington, Warks**
1750	**Charlecote, Warks**
1751	**Brown family moves to Hammersmith**
1751–7	Kirtlington Park, Oxon
1754–61	**Newnham Paddox, Warks**
1754–79	Burghley, Northants
1750s	Ragley Hall, Warks
1754–6	Swynnerton, Staffs
1755	Enville, Staffs
1757–61	**Charlecote, Warks**
1759–80	Trentham, Staffs
1760–3	Aynho, Northants
1760	Chillington, Staffs
	Spring Hill, Worcs
1761–9	Castle Ashby, Northants
1763–73	**Blenheim Palace, Oxon**
1763	Fawsley, Northants
1764	**Brown made Master Gardener at Hampton Court by George III**
1765	Compton Wynyates, Warks
1765–8	**Weston Park, Staffs**
1768–76	**Fisherwick, Staffs**
1768–74	**Compton Verney, Warks**
*c.*1768–75	Patshull, Staffs
1770	**Brown enters into a partnership with architect Henry Holland**
1770–1	Radley, Oxon
1770–6	Ryecote, Oxon
1771–4	**Combe Abbey, Warks**
1773–82	Himley, Staffs
1776	Edgbaston Hall, Birmingham
1777	Ditchley Park, Oxon
1778–82	Nuneham Courtenay, Oxon
1783	**Brown dies and is buried at FenstantonCuratorial**

Curatorial Team and Acknowledgements

Exhibition Curators
Dr Steven Parissien, Compton Verney
Professor Timothy Mowl, University of Bristol

Research
The research team for this exhibition were all members of the University of Bristol's Institute for Garden and Landscape History, and comprised: Jeri Bapasola (Blenheim & Surveying), Dr Dianne Barre (Weston Park & Timeline), Dr Jane Bradney (Croome & Viewing the Landscape), Dr Clare Hickman (Planting the Landscape & Architecture), Diane James (Warwickshire sites), Dr Laura Mayer (Biography, the Sporting Landscape & Shaping the Landscape)

New Photography Stephen Morris

Loan Research and Management Verity Elson, Jenine McGaughran

Installation
Verity Elson, Jenine McGaughran, John Crossley

Exhibition and Guide Design Rose-Innes Associates

Guide Editor Dr Steven Parissien

Acknowledgements
Thanks to all our lenders. Especial thanks go to The Peter Moores Foundation, whose financial help made this exhibition possible.

The grounds at Compton Verney, photographed shortly before the First World War (*Compton Verney House Trust*)

PETER MOORES FOUNDATION

Compton Verney
Warwickshire
CV35 9HZ
info@comptonverney.org.uk
www.comptonverney.org.uk
Registered Charity no. 1032478