

2016
*Year
of
the
English
Garden*



‘CAPABILITY’ BROWN – 300th ANNIVERSARY

Introduction

2016 sees the 300th anniversary of the birth of England's greatest gardener, Lancelot ‘Capability’ Brown, best-known for designing gardens and landscapes at some of the country's grandest stately homes including Blenheim Palace, Chatsworth, Highclere Castle, Burghey, Weston Park and Compton Verney.

‘Capability’ Brown's landscape gardens are synonymous with England's green and pleasant land with their seemingly natural rolling hills, curving lakes, flowing rivers and majestic trees.

A nationwide festival and programme of events is planned with the opportunity to visit over 150 Brown gardens and landscapes in England, including some not usually open to visitors.

‘Capability’ Brown gardens

After centuries of stiff, formal and enclosed gardens, ‘Capability’ Brown transformed landscapes across England in the 18th century using a new natural style, now considered quintessentially English. He replaced heavy formality with wide open expanses, views and vistas and introduced his signature contouring hills, serpentine lakes and strategically-placed specimen trees.

This was gardening on a vast scale, creating parkland and woodland, and using trees to give the same effect as shrubs in regular gardens.

The Shakespeare of English garden design, his gift was to develop gardens and landscapes that looked natural and in harmony with the surrounding countryside even though they often involved moving thousands of tonnes of earth to create the gentle contours and installing expansive manmade lakes, that looked wonderful but were also part of practical drainage systems.



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'Capability' Brown

An estate worker's son, Lancelot Brown was born in August 1716 in the tiny village of Kirkharle, Northumberland. He mastered the principles of his craft serving as a gardener's boy at the local country house, Kirkharle Hall. By 1741 he had reached Stowe, an estate in Buckinghamshire where he quickly assumed responsibility for one of the most pioneering and magnificent landscape gardens in England. He stayed at Stowe for ten years and married Bridget Wayet in the local church.

While at Stowe, he started to take independent commissions and became hugely sought after by the owners of large country house estates. The 7-mile round grounds at the Burghley estate in Lincolnshire were one of the most important commissions of his career which took more than 25 years to complete. He also practised architecture and during the 1750s contributed to several country houses including Blenheim, Chatsworth, Harewood and Compton Verney.

Brown earned the nickname of 'Capability' as he told his clients that he could see the capabilities for improvement in their gardens and landscapes. He was hardworking, constantly busy and with a habit of not always charging for his work. Reportedly he refused to work in Ireland as he had not yet finished England.

Brown is associated with as many as 260 sites, a large number of which can still be seen today. By the time he died in 1783, 4,000 gardens had been landscaped according to his principles. And his design influence on parks and gardens spread across Northern Europe to Russia and through Thomas Jefferson to the United States.

'Capability' Brown Festival

A nationwide festival and events programme is being developed, including the opening of sites not usually accessible to visitors. More details will be released over the coming months.

At 13 major gardens including Blenheim Palace, Chatsworth and Croome, visitors will be able to see specially-created 'Capability' Brown exhibitions.

For more festival details, an interactive map of 'Capability' Brown gardens and landscapes and event listings, visit capabilitybrown.org

For more on England's gardens, go to visitengland.com