

LANCELOT “CAPABILITY” BROWN 1716 - 1783



Lancelot “Capability” Brown is probably the most famous landscape gardener in British history. The new, natural style of park he created with undulating lawns studded with clumps and specimen trees leading to a lake has become our notion of the quintessential English landscape.

He was born in 1716, at Kirkharle, Northumberland where, after leaving school in nearby Cambo, he trained as a gardener. In 1739 he moved south and in 1741 he became head gardener at Stowe in Buckinghamshire. In 1749 he set up in business on his own account and in 1751 moved with his wife and young family to Hammersmith, then an important centre for nurserymen and market gardening just west of London. His first major independent commissions were at Warwick Castle, Packington and Croome.

Throughout his career Brown’s clients were members of the same aristocratic, political and family circles who advertised his expertise by word of mouth. He developed a portfolio covering about 250 estates across the whole country although his ideas were not always implemented. One of the most significant clusters of parks designed by Brown is in the West Midlands where he worked at the 25 estates mentioned in this leaflet and advised on several others.

Brown spent much of his time visiting estates to offer preliminary advice to owners, sometimes providing more detailed plans and revisiting during the works to inspect progress. Landowners greatly respected his judgement. Although of lower social standing than his clients, he enjoyed close and friendly relationships with many of them often staying as their guest while on his travels.

Brown acquired his nickname from his habit of telling clients he saw “great capability” for improvement in their landscapes. He had a remarkable ability to read a landscape quickly and visualise how judicious recontouring of its slopes, opening up of woodland or strategic planting could transform it into an expansive natural looking layout giving no hint of human hand in its creation. This contrasted with the more geometric or stylised landscapes of the earlier part of the 18th century many of which, now unfashionable, came to be reshaped or overlain by Brown’s interventions.

Brown did not draw plans himself but employed surveyors to produce them to his direction. His busy schedule prevented him from superintending landscaping works directly. For this he employed a number of peripatetic clerks of works who managed locally recruited craftsmen and labourers on site or sometimes supervised existing estate workers. Some landowners managed the projects themselves following advice given by Brown.

From his earliest days at Stowe Brown was also involved in erecting garden buildings. At Tixall, Trentham and Newnham Paddox he acted as architect, rebuilding or remodelling the existing houses (all now demolished). At Croome he also designed the church.

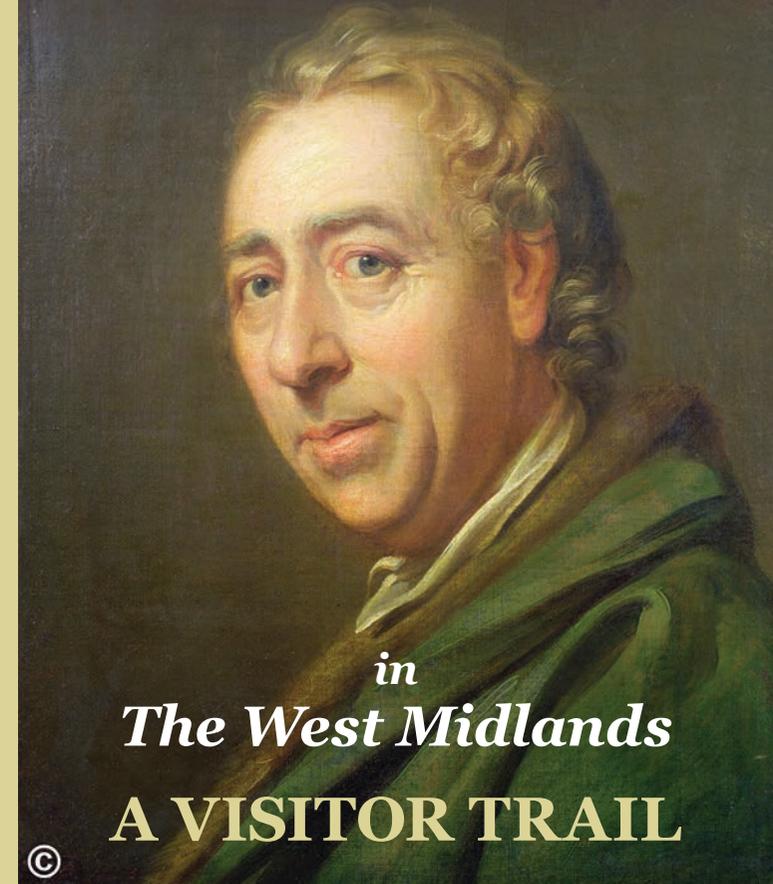
In 1764 Brown was appointed the King’s Master Gardener at Hampton Court to where he moved house. He continued his busy round of visits across the country alongside this role despite repeated bouts of a debilitating respiratory ailment. He died in London in 1783 after an evening dining with his friend and client Lord Coventry of Croome. He is buried in the churchyard of Fenstanton in Huntingdonshire where he owned a house. On his tomb is the fitting epitaph “*more than genius slumbers here*”.

© Portrait of Lancelot ‘Capability’ Brown, c.1770-75, Cosway, Richard (1742-1821)/Private Collection/Bridgeman Images

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in *The West Midlands* A VISITOR TRAIL

**Staffordshire Gardens
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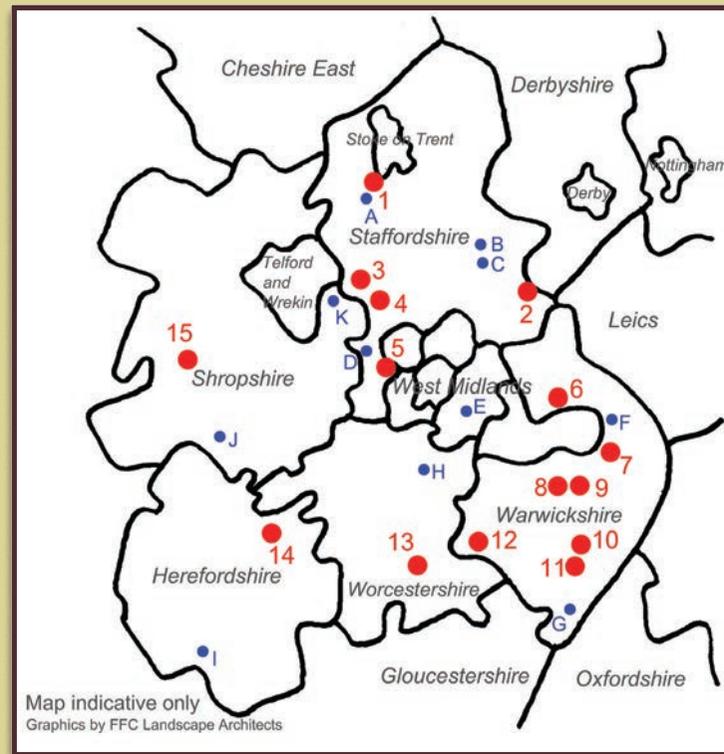
Shropshire Parks and Gardens Trust

Lancelot “Capability” Brown in the West Midlands: special events in 2016

As part of the national festival to mark the 300th anniversary of Brown’s birth special events are taking place during 2016 at many of the parks he worked at in the West Midlands. This leaflet shows the location of all the parks and gives contact details for enquiries about opening times, where to find information about the parks and the events which have been arranged for this year

Other information about the CB300 Festival can be found at <http://www.capabilitybrown.org/events> and <http://visitbirmingham.com/what-to-do/festivals-events/sports-outdoors/the-capability-brown-festival-2016/>

1. **TRENTHAM**
Open daily (except Christmas Day).
Special events throughout 2016.
www.trentham.co.uk
enquiry@trentham.co.uk
☎ 01782 646646  
2. **FISHERWICK**
Open by appointment.
thewalledgarden.co.uk/contacts
3. **WESTON PARK**
Open daily 28 May - 4 September.
Events for 2016.
www.weston-park.co.uk
☎ 01952 652100  
4. **CHILLINGTON**
Limited opening March to August.
Special events 2016.
www.chillingtonhall.co.uk/events
☎ 01902 851410  
5. **HIMLEY HALL**
Open daily.
www.dudley.gov.uk/see-and-do/himley-hall/
☎ 01384 817817
6. **PACKINGTON**
Open May 14/15 & Sept 18 ONLY
NOT OPEN TO THE PUBLIC ON OTHER DATES.
www.packingtonestate.net
7. **COOMBE ABBEY**
Open daily.
www.coventry.gov.uk/coombe
☎ 024 7645 3720



In addition to the parks listed, Brown also worked at the following sites which are not open to the public. **STAFFORDSHIRE** A. Swynnerton; B. Ingestre; C. Tixall (Tixall Broad can be viewed from the canal by boat or towpath); D. Patshull (The southern end of the lake belongs to Patshull Park Hotel. Views of parts of the park from the church of St. Mary. Key at the hotel); **W. MIDLANDS** E. Edgbaston; **WARWICKSHIRE:** F. Newnham Paddox; G. Compton Wynyates **WORCESTERSHIRE** H. Hewell Grange **HEREFORDSHIRE** I. Moccas Court; **SHROPSHIRE** J. Oakley Park; K. Tong



Weston Park



The River at Croome

8. **WARWICK CASTLE**
Open daily except Christmas Day
www.warwick-castle.com
Customer.information@warwick-castle.com
☎ 0871 265 2000
9. **WARWICK CASTLE PARK**
NOT NORMALLY OPEN TO PUBLIC.
10. **CHARLECOTE**
Open Daily except Christmas Day.
www.nationaltrust.org.uk/charlecote-park
☎ 01789 470277  
11. **COMPTON VERNEY**
Open Tue-Sun (Mar-Dec)
www.comptonverney.org.uk
☎ 01926 645500
12. **RAGLEY**
Open Daily Mar-Oct.
May be closed for private events.
www.ragley.co.uk
info@ragley.co.uk
☎ 01789 762090  
13. **CROOME**
croomepark@nationaltrust.org.uk
www.nationaltrust.org.uk/croome
☎ 01905 371006  
14. **BERRINGTON**
berrington@nationaltrust.org.uk
www.nationaltrust.org.uk/berrington-hall
☎ 01568 615721  
15. **CHURCH STRETTON**
Rectory Wood. Open daily.
www.shropshire.gov.uk/outdoor-recreation/parks-and-countryside-sites/rectory-wood-and-field-countryside-site/

This leaflet has been jointly produced by the County Gardens Trusts of Staffordshire, Hereford and Worcester, Warwickshire and Shropshire whose purpose is to promote the understanding, enjoyment and conservation of historic parks and gardens. For more information about the Trusts please visit:

www.staffordshiregardensandparks.org
www.warwickshiregardenstrust.org.uk
www.shropshiregardens.org.uk
www.hwgt.org.uk