

Capability Brown at Chatsworth



View of Chatsworth across the water © Chatsworth House

Lancelot 'Capability' Brown redesigned the landscape at Chatsworth in Derbyshire for the 4th Duke of Devonshire (1720-1764) from the late 1750s until 1765. The park covers 1000 acres and is enclosed by a 15 km long dry stone wall and deer fence. Brown's work at Chatsworth came relatively early in his career as an independent landscape architect, at a time when his style was becoming established.

Chatsworth includes all Brown's signature features: smooth rolling grassland running up to the house, a natural-looking lake, trees planted singly, or in belts and clumps, particularly on hills, and carriage drives with carefully planned views. The drive he created at Chatsworth, with falling parkland in the foreground and views of the bridge and the house beyond, backed by steeply rising wooded slopes, is one of the most impressive approaches to a country house in England.

Chatsworth: www.chatsworth.org

Particular thanks to Rachel Parkin at Chatsworth for her help

For more information about Brown and his work go to capabilitybrown.org/research



Capability Brown

Lancelot 'Capability' Brown (1716-1783) was born in the Northumberland village of Kirkharle, and went on to popularise the English landscape style, advising on over 250 large country estates throughout England and Wales.

Formal gardens gave way to naturalistic parkland of trees, expanses of water and rolling grass. He also designed great houses, churches and garden buildings, and was skilled in engineering, especially with water.

This guide was created as part of a festival celebrating the 300th anniversary of his birth. Find out more about the man and his work at capabilitybrown.org/research

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



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Paine's bridge over the River Derwent © Chatsworth House/Matthew Bullen

A painting by Jan Siberechts of 1707, which can be seen at Chatsworth, shows the landscape as it was before Brown's work. There were lavish walled formal gardens immediately around the house, but the landscape outside the walls was rough and bare. The steep sides of the River Derwent meant that it couldn't be seen from the house.

A view over water

In order to give a view over water from the house, Brown sloped the ground away from the house on the west side, and built a dam to raise the level of the River Derwent. This created a wider, natural-looking lake in the middle ground of the view from the house, with rolling grass sloping right up to the walls of the house. Walpole wrote in 1761 that the 4th Duke of Devonshire was 'making vast plantations... and levelling a great deal of ground to show the river under the direction of Brown.'

Brown's associate or foreman, Michael Millican, oversaw this extensive programme of earth moving, drainage, levelling and tree planting in the park. Millican was the 'man on the ground' supervising the land forming, drainage and turfing while Brown made visits to inspect and advise.

Paine's Bridge

At the same time as Brown's work, the architect James Paine (1717-1789) was designing a new wing for the house, a substantial stable block and an eye-catcher in the form of a working Mill. Paine designed Three Arch Bridge (1759-61, listed Grade II), which carries Brown's carriage drive across the River Derwent and up to the house. The bridge was carefully angled so as to be seen from the house and placed in such a way as to provide a last, striking view to the house from the entrance drive. The bridge is ornamented with statues by Cibber. Both this and One Arch Bridge (1759-60) at the south of the park were based on Italian ones, like the Roman bridge at Rimini in Italy.

Capability Brown at Chatsworth



Capability Brown features

- ① Parkland with clumps of trees
- ② Perimeter belt of trees
- ③ Sloping ground
- ④ Carriage drive
- ⑤ Emperor Lake
- ⑥ The Mill

- ★ Eye-catcher
- 👁 Viewpoint

~ Ha-ha

🌲 Specimen trees

🌳 Woodland or copse

🌳 Parkland trees

🌱 Shrubbery

📍 Visitor Centre

☕ Refreshments

🚻 Toilets

P Parking

♿ Disabled Parking

500 yards
500 metres

Paine also designed the Mill, which was built between 1761 and 1762 as a replacement for the former working mill that originally stood near the house. Framed by small open woodland to the west, the plain, classical elevations of the Mill provided an eye-catcher in the park, terminating the views from the north and south.

Brown designed extensive plantations, especially along the ridge of high ground to the east of the estate. He carefully placed trees singly or in clumps in the parkland, and a perimeter belt of trees was planted to enclose the view.

Formal gardens were re-created to the south and west of Chatsworth House in the mid nineteenth century, but Brown's parkland remains as he planned.



The famous cascade and Chatsworth House, with Brown's landscape beyond © Chatsworth House/Matthew Bullen

Biodiversity at Chatsworth

The park at Chatsworth is home to red and fallow deer, sheep, cattle and many wild animals. The parkland features support a variety of habitats including wood pasture and parkland, ancient woodland, deciduous woodland, broadleaved and mixed conifer woodland, lowland dry acid grassland, good quality semi-improved grassland, upland heathland and wetland habitats associated with the river.

Chatsworth Old Park Special Site of Scientific Interest (SSSI) within the site is important for its diverse range of deadwood invertebrates and lichens dependent upon the large number of ancient trees, mostly oak, formerly part of the medieval deer park. Nationally rare species include the rove beetle, silken fungus beetle and cobweb beetle and the dry acid grassland supports plants such as heath bedstraw and tormentil. The site also includes Jumble Coppice SSSI designated for its geological significance.



Chatsworth Park from the garden © Chatsworth House/Matthew Bullen

For more information on habitats and species supported by Brown landscapes and the two SSSIs see

www.capabilitybrown.org/garden/chatsworth.

Chatsworth today

Chatsworth has been passed down through 16 generations of the Cavendish family and remains home to the Duke and Duchess of Devonshire. The park at Chatsworth is a farmed, food-producing landscape.

Chatsworth is open to the public. For more information see www.chatsworth.org.