



GRIMSTHORPE CASTLE



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# Capability Brown at Grimsthorpe



View of Grimsthorpe across the lake © Steffie Shields

At the beginning of his career, Capability Brown is thought to have created the original lake, Mill Dam Pond, at Grimsthorpe Castle in Lincolnshire. Later, in 1771, the 3rd Duke of Ancaster asked him to make plans for further improvements, including extending the park and creating a sham bridge over the lakes.

Brown's early work at Grimsthorpe was for Peregrine Bertie, 2nd Duke of Ancaster. The estate accounts for 1741 and 1742 show that a great deal had been happening in the park, including remodelling the canalised fishponds and draining land for farming use. Brown, who had recently left his native Northumberland, is thought to have built the dam for the 10-acre Mill Dam Pond and to have initiated experimental work to supply water from springs at the ruined Vaudey Abbey to the castle. In 1745, the duke's executors paid Brown's fee including settling his rent at nearby Witham on the Hill manor.

Grimsthorpe: [www.grimsthorpe.co.uk](http://www.grimsthorpe.co.uk)

With thanks to Ray Biggs and the Lincolnshire Gardens Trust

For more information about Brown and his work go to [capabilitybrown.org/research](http://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](http://capabilitybrown.org/research)

Portrait of Lancelot 'Capability' Brown, c.1770-75, by Richard Cosway (17421821)/Private Collection/Bridgeman Images.



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Vista to Vanbrugh summerhouse framed by oaks © Steffie Shields

### Brown's plans for Grimsthorpe

Brown was at the height of his career when he returned to Grimsthorpe on 11 December 1771. The 3rd Duke of Ancaster, who had inherited the estate in 1742, wanted Brown to draw up plans for further improvements to the park. A detailed entry in Brown's account book notes that he and his surveyor, Samuel Lapidge, spent almost three weeks making a full survey and that four drawings had been sent to the duke, including for the setting of the Castle and 'The Oaks' area. Only two have survived – his plans for New Park and a sham bridge in place of the existing causeway bridge. He charged £105 (£166,400 in 2015) for the plans but his travel costs were left at his client's discretion: 'My journeys to Grimsthorpe what his grace pleases'. In 1773 and 1774 Brown also made improvements to Ancaster's London villa at Richmond Hill.

### New Park

One of the Brown proposals was the formation of a new deer enclosure, New Park, with an enclosing tree belt for game cover around fields south of the park. His new planting advice probably included Scots pine also framing the view east, causing visitors to pause at the highest point on the 'Four-Mile Riding', then the main approach, by drawing the eye through the area of 'God's Valley' to the castle.

### Sham bridge

Brown also supplied a plan for 'a Sham Bridge to be placed at the head of that water the road to Grimsthorpe goes over'. The existing 'Red Bridge' causeway, spanned the two lakes, Great Water and Red Bridge Pond. Brown's ambitious scheme for a sham bridge with 11 arches of graduated heights, spanning 350 feet, would have made a more striking feature in the valley below the castle but was never built, probably because of the costs involved. Brown's proposal to create a third reservoir, to act as a silt trap and help manage the flow of water in the lakes, was carried out by engineer John Grundy. This was later filled in.



# Capability Brown at Grimsthorpe



### Capability Brown features

- 1 Lake created from fishponds
- 2 Parkland
- 3 New Park
- ★ 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



Grimsthorpe Castle © Steffie Shields

Brown motivated the development and management of the estate, both at the beginning and towards the end of his career. His early 10-acre lake and drainage work at Grimsthorpe led directly to his first big break, at the end of 1741, when he left to work full-time as both Head Gardener and Steward at Stowe. Engineer John Grundy Junior continued improving the water features, enlarging one of Brown's dams to create 'Great Water'. He also completed the work Brown had started to feed water from the springs at Vaudey Abbey, into a cistern and then pump it to the house. Brown's 1772 plans, including New Park,

were never intended to be carried out by his own men but by staff at the estate. Although his sham bridge was not built, Brown's forestry advice and ideas for plantations in the park were carried out. In a 1799 book, agricultural writer Arthur Young wrote admiringly of "the situation of the castle commanding on one side the park and water, and on the other a large extent of cultivation".



Archway onto the park © Steffie Shields

### Biodiversity at Grimsthorpe

At Grimsthorpe the parkland features support a variety of habitats including wood pasture and parkland, lowland calcareous grassland, good quality semi-improved grassland, deciduous woodland, broadleaved woodland, coniferous woodland and habitats associated with the lake. Grimsthorpe Park is a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and is probably the best remaining example of ancient parkland in Lincolnshire. The ancient and mature trees support more than 250 species of beetle and the hollow trees provide roosts for bats.

See [www.capabilitybrown.org/garden/grimsthorpe](http://www.capabilitybrown.org/garden/grimsthorpe) for further information about Grimsthorpe Park SSSI.

### Grimsthorpe Castle today

The park and gardens are open to the public, as is the castle, remodelled by architect Sir John Vanbrugh in the early 18th century. All are listed Grade I.