

# My ideal garden: Capability Brown



Visit **Kearsney Abbey** to appreciate the **English Landscape** style pioneered by garden designer **Capability Brown** (1716-1783). Pupils can learn about **Capability Brown** and his work, **draw a sketch plan** of Kearsney Abbey and its features and design their own park or feature in a Capability Brown style.

Suitable for **KS2**, adaptable for **KS1**

**Curriculum areas covered:**



Map from Capability Brown (2016) by Sarah Rutherford. Reproduced with the kind permission of National Trust Books, part of Pavilion Books Group Limited.



## Art & Design and Arts Award

Learn about great artists  
and analyse and  
respond to their work  
Sketchbooks



## History

Continuity and  
change



## Geography

Communicate  
geographical information  
in a variety of ways



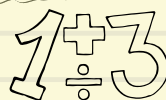
## English

Spoken language  
Composition  
Non-fiction



## Physical Education

Sustained  
activity



## Mathematics

Measures  
Angles  
Shapes  
Lines of symmetry



## Design & Technology

Exploring Google technology

## Before your visit:

- Look at the map and list of features in 'Reading a Capability Brown Landscape' on **Capability Brown resource sheet 1**. If you are doing Arts Award or are teaching in Upper KS2 you may wish to use this resource to explore his life and work.

## Where to go:

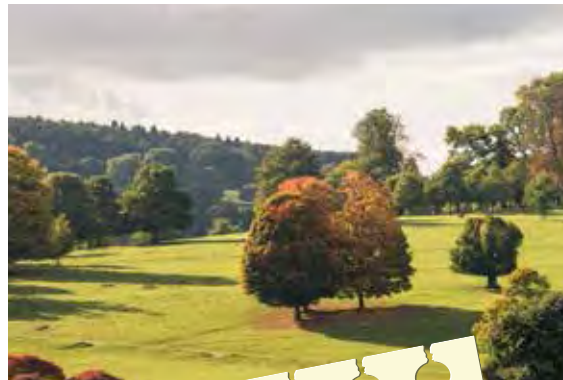
- Collect the **PUPILS' GREY RESOURCE RUCKSACKS**. From the old billiards room, follow the trail around the park outlined below.

## During the visit:

- Look at the gardens of Kearsney Abbey from the old billiards room. Ask pupils to look at the photograph of the house on **Kearsney Matters resource sheet 2**. Compare the landscape with the 'Reading a Capability Brown Landscape' map in the **Capability Brown resource sheet 1**. How many features from 'Reading a Capability Brown Landscape' can they see? (House looking over landscape, landscape looks natural, curved entrance pathway, lake, avenues of trees, Cedar of Lebanon, woodland, eyecatcher bridge). Ask pupils for ideas of where they might have placed other eyecatcher features. Discuss what is manmade/planted by humans and what is natural in the view.
- Explore the grounds by walking down to the play area past the Ice House, Cedar of Lebanon, boating lake weir, avenues of trees, lake and culverts, back to the pump house and folly wall. Encourage pupils to think about what is natural, what is manmade and what is made to look 'natural' or decorative rather than functional (the folly, the pump house, the weir) and to justify their arguments. Ask them to do observational drawings or sketches of some or all features.
- Ask pupils to draw their own sketch plan of the site in the manner of 'Reading a Capability Brown Landscape'.

## Resources during visit:

- Use on-site **GREY RESOURCE RUCKSACKS** for clipboards, and ponchos and waterproof mats in case of rain. You will also need the **Kearsney matters resource sheet 2, Capability Brown Resource Sheet 1** and the **Sketch plan resource sheet**.
- School to supply:** Writing and drawing materials (pens/pencils and paper); a print out of 'Reading a Capability Brown Landscape' would also be useful.



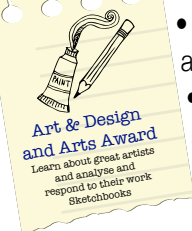


## After the visit:


- Choose a site the pupils know well, e.g. their school grounds.
- Survey the site, measuring its dimensions and angles using metre sticks and protractors. Draw a plan at a scale of 1cm = 1m. Using the Internet and satellite images on Google Maps, compare the plan drawing with the aerial image to see how accurate pupils have been. Analyse the geometry of the site, determining its aerial shape or combination of shapes, and any lines of symmetry present.
- Ask pupils to produce a labelled drawing of how they could transform the area into a Capability Brown-style garden.
- Or ask them to design a single feature or folly to add to the existing Kearsney Abbey park, in Capability Brown style (see **Capability Brown resource sheet 2** for rules for designing a folly and for images to use as inspiration). Include an indication of its overall dimensions, to give an idea of the scale of the design.
- Ask pupils to do more research on Capability Brown and produce a study of his life and work.

## Curriculum links:

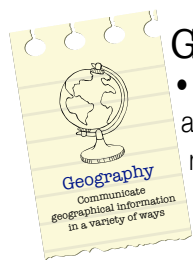
### Art & Design:

- 
- Produce creative work, exploring their ideas and recording their experiences.
  - Become proficient in drawing, painting, sculpture and other art, craft and design techniques.
  - Evaluate and analyse creative works using the language of art, craft and design.
  - Know about great artists, craft makers and designers, and understand the historical and cultural development of their art forms.


### History:

- 
- Understand historical concepts such as continuity and change, cause and consequence, similarity, difference and significance, and use them to make connections, draw contrasts, analyse trends, frame historically valid questions and create their own structured accounts, including written narratives and analyses.

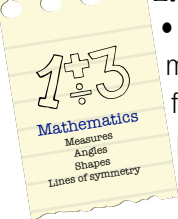
### Geography:

- 
- Communicate geographical information in a variety of ways, including through maps, numerical and quantitative skills and writing at length.

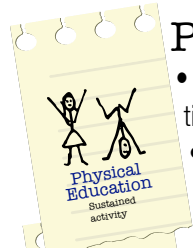
### English:

- 
- Maintain attention and participate actively in collaborative conversations, staying on topic and initiating and responding to comments.
    - Write clearly, accurately and coherently, adapting their language and style in and for a range of contexts, purposes and audiences.
    - Comprehension (both listening and reading)
  - Composition (articulating ideas and structuring them in speech and writing).


### Mathematics:

- 
- Become **fluent** in the fundamentals of mathematics, including through varied and frequent practice with increasingly complex problems over time, so that pupils develop conceptual understanding and the ability to recall and apply knowledge rapidly and accurately.
  - Reason mathematically by following a line of enquiry, conjecturing relationships and generalisations, and developing an argument, justification or proof using mathematical language.
  - Can solve problems by applying their mathematics to a variety of routine and non-routine problems with increasing sophistication, including breaking down problems into a series of simpler steps and persevering in seeking solutions.

### Physical Education:

- 
- Are physically active for sustained periods of time.
  - Lead healthy, active lives

### Design & Technology:

- 
- Develop the creative, technical and practical expertise needed to perform everyday tasks confidently and to participate successfully in an increasingly technological world.

# Resource Sheet 1 (a) Capability Brown



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

## Capability Brown

Lancelot 'Capability' Brown (1716-1783) was one of the UK's most talented landscape architects, and he changed the face of Britain forever.

Born in the small Northumberland village of Kirkhale, Brown's name is today linked with more than 250 estates, covering 200 square miles throughout England and Wales.

Brown popularised the English Landscape Style. Formal gardens gave way to naturalistic parkland with trees, expanses of water and smoothly rolling grass. This style became fashionable throughout Europe and beyond in the 18th century.

His talents were not limited to landscapes. He also designed great houses, churches and garden buildings, and was known for his skill in engineering, especially with water.



### Capability Brown Festival

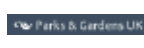
This guide has been created as part of a festival celebrating the 300th anniversary of the birth of Capability Brown in 1716.

The festival aimed to celebrate his work and encourage more people to visit and appreciate the landscapes he created. It was funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund and managed by the Landscape Institute.

To find out more about Brown's work go to [capabilitybrown.org.uk/research](http://capabilitybrown.org.uk/research). For information on the individual landscapes he created go to [capabilitybrown.org.uk/map](http://capabilitybrown.org.uk/map).



Croome Rotunda NT Images & James Dobson



LOTTERY FUNDED



# Resource Sheet 1 (b) Capability Brown



## Capability Brown Facts

### His nickname

Brown's nickname 'Capability' is thought to have come from his habit of describing landscapes as having 'great capabilities'.

### Birth and death

Brown was baptised on 30 August 1716 but we do not know his exact birthday, nor exactly where he was buried in 1738. A modern-day headstone marks the approximate place in the parish churchyard of Fenstanton, Cambridgeshire.

### A man of many skills

Brown was a skilled water engineer, including complex drainage' schemes, and creating lakes covering up to 80 acres. He also turned his hand to architecture, designing mansions at Croome, Redgrave and Claremont.

### Royal gardener

King George III appointed Brown as Royal Gardener for Hampton Court and St James's in 1764, with a salary of £2,000 a year. This allowed the family to live in Wilderness House in the grounds of Hampton Court Palace.

### Account book

Only one of Brown's account books is known to have survived. It is mostly written in his own hand and lists clients and payments received and made. Held by the RHS Lindley Library, it is a major source of information about his work.



## Natural landscapes

A landscape garden may often look completely natural but is, in fact, manmade. Brown believed that if people thought his landscapes were beautiful and natural, then he had been successful. He created gardens for pleasure that were also practical.

Brown's genius was in his ability to quickly see how a work of art could be created out of parkland or an existing formal garden. His workmen moved huge amounts of earth and diverted streams or rivers to create the natural effect that he wanted. He drained land for grazing and planted woods for timber, so that the estate was productive as well as attractive

## A humble background

Brown was from a humble working family but had some education before training in gardening. His talent blossomed in the 1740s while he was Head Gardener at Stowe, Buckinghamshire, then the most famous garden of the day. At Stowe he replaced the ornate parterres and formal gardens with a smooth open lawn. His first masterpiece there was the romantic Grecian Valley. This included classical buildings, reflecting the fashion for antiquities, which became popular as rich young men went on the 'Grand Tour' of Europe as part of their education.

## Business Success

Brown set up his own business before he left Stowe in 1751. He combined his artistic talent, technical skills in architecture, engineering and landscaping, with sound business sense and scrupulousness.

His friendly nature and way of easing difficulties led to an impressive list of clients that included six prime ministers and half the House of Lords. In 1764 he became the Royal Gardener to King George III. He built up a successful business with an annual income equivalent to over £20 million today. Brown was a driven man who criss-crossed the country for his work, but his letters show how dearly he loved his wife and children. His happy family life was interrupted by bouts of illness, but he continued to work hard until his death in 1783 aged 67.



# Resource Sheet 1 (c) Capability Brown



## Capability Brown dates in context

- 1707 The Act of Union between Scotland and England
- 1716 Capability Brown born in Kirkhale
- 1727 George II becomes king
- 1739 Brown moves away from Northumberland, probably to Lincolnshire
- 1741 Brown is employed by Lord Cobham at Stowe
- 1744 Marries Bridget Waye
- 1746 Their first child, Bridget, is born
- 1748 Lance, their eldest son, christened in January
- 1750 Brown commissioned by the 6th Earl of Coventry to redesign house and park at Croome
- 1751 Leaves Stowe and sets up his own business
- 1754 Consulted by 9th Earl of Essex on altering the house and grounds at Burghley
- 1760 Brown working for the Duke of Northumberland at Syon and Alnwick
- 1760 George III takes the throne
- 1761 Politician Horace Walpole notes that Brown is working at Chatsworth
- 1764 Brown appointed Royal Gardener, working at Richmond and Hampton Court
- 1764 Starts re-landscaping 2000 acres of parkland at Blenheim Palace
- 1767 Buys the manor of Fenstanton
- 1775 The American War of Independence begins
- 1783 Capability Brown dies and is buried in Fenstanton parish church
- 1789 French citizens storm the Bastille in Paris

## Understanding Brown's landscapes

The illustration overleaf shows some of the key features of a Brown landscape. Brown wrote very little about his work, much of his advice was never written down and his plans have not always survived. So what we know about Brown's work has been pieced together from looking at the landscapes, letters and diaries, old maps, archives at the estates where he worked, Brown's one surviving account book and his bank records at Drummonds.

The Capability Brown website includes summaries of what we know about his work at each site, as well as information on books and websites about Brown's work.

## A costly business

Having your park landscaped by Brown was an expensive business. Brown's landscapes cost the equivalent of millions of pounds today. The calculator on [www.measuringworth.com](http://www.measuringworth.com) shows the cost of labour then and now and has been used to work out the modern values given on [www.capabilitybrown.org](http://www.capabilitybrown.org).

## Brown and biodiversity

By designing grassland and parkland trees, woodland and water parkland features, Brown created a mosaic of habitats, concentrated in one place, that provide plenty of homes for wildlife, some of them very rare. Today Brown's landscapes offer important refuges for wildlife and stepping stones for species to migrate between habitats in the more intensively farmed or developed landscape that often surrounds them.

The most important are the hundreds of existing trees he incorporated or new trees he planted which are now 300 to 1000 years old. They are important features as trees of great age, and for their open-grown character with huge trunks and spreading branches. The decaying wood and nooks and crannies are habitats for lichens, fungi and invertebrates such as beetles, as well as roosts for bats and birds.

# Resource Sheet 1 (d) Capability Brown



**Park** The landscape style replaced enclosed formal gardens with sweeps of grass and water going right up to the house.

**Drives** Brown designed long, curving drives so that visitors had impressive views of the estate as they approached the house.

**House** The mansion was the focus for views to and from the park and was sometimes restyled to match the new landscape.

**Lake** Water was used to enliven the middle of the landscape picture. Brown often hid the ends of a lake so it looked like a wide river.

**Ha-ha** A deep ditch below the level of the grass, giving an uninterrupted view of the park. Animals could be seen grazing but could not stray onto the lawn.

**Trees** Single trees and clumps of native varieties, such as oak, beech and sweet chestnut, were planted to break up the expanse of grass and frame views.

**Cedar of Lebanon** Brown also used newly imported exotics, like the Cedar of Lebanon, which became known as his signature tree.

**Woodland** was planted in a belt around the estate boundary, to hide service buildings, for timber or to create **pleasure grounds** with attractive rides or gravel walks.

**Eye-catchers** Garden buildings, fine single trees and features outside the estate, such as a church spire, were used to draw the eye to the longer view.

**Parkland features** such as a boat-house, or ice house were both decorative and useful while a rotunda, temple or menagerie gave a place to stop in the park.



Map from *Capability Brown* (2016) by Sarah Rutherford. Reproduced with the kind permission of National Trust Books, part of Pavilion Books Group Limited.

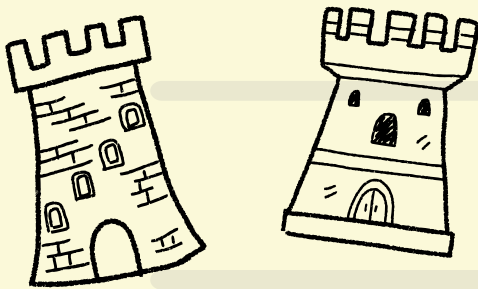


# Resource Sheet 2

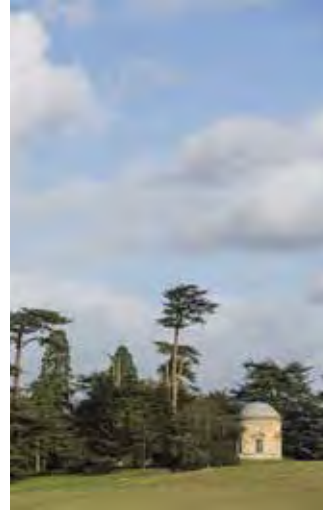
## Rules for designing a Folly

1. **Follies have no purpose other than as an ornament.** Often they have some of the appearance of a building constructed for a purpose, such as a castle or tower, but this appearance is a sham.
2. **Follies are buildings, or parts of buildings...** they are more than just garden ornaments such as sculpture.
3. **Follies are purpose-built.** Follies are deliberately built as ornaments.
4. **Follies are often eccentric in design or construction...** with unusual details or form.
5. **There is often an element of fakery in their construction...** for example, a folly which pretends to be the remains of an old building but which was in fact constructed in that state.
6. **Follies are built or commissioned for pleasure.**

Adapted from Jones, Barbara (1974).  
Follies & Grottoes. Constable & Co. p. 1.



### Examples of Capability Brown follies



**The Rotunda at Croome, Worcestershire**, one of Capability Brown's 'eye-catchers' built 1754-7 at Croome Court, Croome Park, Worcestershire  
[www.nationaltrust.org.uk](http://www.nationaltrust.org.uk)



**The Temple of Ancient Virtue in the autumn at Stowe, Buckinghamshire**  
[www.nationaltrust.org.uk](http://www.nationaltrust.org.uk)



# Resource Sheet - Kearsney Parks Sketch Map

