

Heritage Lottery Fund grant for Capability Brown Festival

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The East Lawn at Compton Verney Compton Verney

The 300th anniversary of the birth of Lancelot ‘Capability’ Brown will be marked with a nationwide festival, thanks to a grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF).

The Landscape Institute has been awarded £911,100 by HLF to stage the Capability Brown Festival throughout 2016 including a series of events and activities celebrating the life and influence of England’s most famous landscape architect.

Paul Lincoln, Deputy Chief Executive of the Landscape Institute, said: “As the first ever celebration of Brown’s work the festival has two key strands. The first will increase public access to the sites Brown created and advised on – some of them rarely seen by the public before. The second will allow us to discover more about his work, and how he created his landscapes. The festival will fix Brown at the forefront of modern thinking on design and management of the natural environment and celebrate his enduring legacy which is still relevant to how we plan, manage and design our landscapes today.”

Described as the ‘father of landscape architecture’, Lancelot Brown changed the face of eighteenth-century England through his designs of hundreds of gardens. Nicknamed ‘capability’ because of his habit of telling clients that their gardens had ‘great capabilities’, his carefully constructed rolling landscapes using trees, lawns, water, bridges, and buildings have shaped people’s view of the quintessential English countryside.

There are thought to be over 250 sites attributed or connected to Brown spread across all English regions, with five known in Wales. They range from small private gardens to larger country estates; many are now managed by the National Trust or English Heritage or are Historic Houses Association members.

Surviving Brown landscapes include the World Heritage Site at Blenheim and Highclere Castle (set for ITV’s Downton Abbey) as well as 140 sites on the English Heritage Register of Parks and Gardens, 180 listed buildings and at least five Scheduled Ancient Monuments. 12 are now public parks, owned and managed by local authorities, demonstrating the sustainability of his designs and the relative simplicity of their management.

A volunteer researcher, one of hundreds all over the country, recently discovered a letter in the British Library that hinted that Brown may have worked at Shilinglee in Sussex, a site that hadn’t appeared on any previous list of his work.

Drew Bennellick, Head of Landscape and Natural Heritage at HLF, said: “Capability Brown’s contribution to this country’s landscape heritage deserves to be better known. This festival marking the 300th anniversary of his birth is an ideal opportunity for people to discover the far-reaching legacy of a man who shaped our idea of the quintessential English countryside.”

The Capability Brown Festival will be the first ever celebration of Brown’s works and brings together a huge range of events, openings and exhibitions along with new research to fully establish Brown’s importance in the development of landscape design.

The festival will also seek to share his story with a wider audience and encourage different ways of exploring landscape and its history. Activities will include geocaching treasure hunts, competitive poetry slams, computer games for young children and hands-on tours and study days.

Organisers hope to open up as many of the sites as possible including several gardens that are currently inaccessible. Guides and maps to important Brown sites will be produced and local exhibitions developed to help visitors orientate themselves within Brown’s distinctive landscapes and open up his legacy to new audiences. An online calendar of events will be created along with a map so people can find their nearest site.

Notes to editors

Festival partners

Founding partners: English Heritage, National Trust, Natural England, Parks & Gardens UK, VisitEngland, The National Garden Scheme, The Historic Houses Association, The Association of Garden Trusts, Kolab, The National Association of Decorative & Fine Arts Societies, Country Landowners Association, Garden History Society.

Festival partners: Blenheim Palace, Royal Horticultural Society, Bridgeman Images.

Partners' quotes

Gilly Drummond, Chair of the Capability Brown Festival, said: “This is truly fantastic news. We are currently working with owners and managers of Brown landscapes, and with hundreds of volunteers to stage an exciting and lively nationwide festival celebrating the life and work of the greatest contributor to our amazingly rich heritage of parks, gardens and wider designed landscape. Events and activities for all ages and interests are in the pipeline. Today’s news is a wonderful boost to all those efforts and ensures Brown’s legacy will be properly celebrated in 2016.”

National Trust

Ingrid Samuel, Historic Environment Director at the National Trust, which cares for and protects over 20 of Lancelot Capability Brown sites said: “Brown changed the spaces of Britain in a way that continues to influence our idea of landscape beauty. In a year’s time we have a unique opportunity to mark the 300th anniversary of the man who was arguably this country’s most prolific and greatest landscape gardener.

“Properties in Trust ownership represent a chronology of his working life from his formative career years as Head Gardener, to his first independent commission in 1749, with his last design shortly before his death in 1783.

“The trust cares for some are the best examples of Brown’s work which have retained the integrity of their original design intent, including Stowe, Wimpole, Petworth and Croome.

“The HLF’s support for Capability Brown 300 is absolutely vital for ensuring that many more of Brown’s landscapes, spanning his life’s work are open for people to explore. This is an opportunity to widen the appeal and understanding to existing and new audiences of this unique art form.

“Funding from the HLF will help our properties specifically by enabling them to become information hubs for visitors to help bring Brown’s projects to life for a much wider audience. We can’t wait to share the stories about the landscapes and the people behind them, both when they were created but also how we care for and maintain them today.”

English Heritage

John Watkins, Head of Gardens and Landscape at English Heritage, said: "Capability Brown was one of our great landscape designers, who transformed the gardens of England's country estates. We are delighted to be supporting next year's festival. Brown worked at nine of the landscapes in our care today including Wrest Park in Bedfordshire – one of the festival’s regional hubs – and Audley End in Essex. Audley is a perfect showcase of his style, he banished all formality to the kitchen garden and created a sublime setting, incorporating the great house and the river Cam."

HHA

Richard Compton, President of the Historic Houses Association, said: “A third of Brown’s sites are cared for by Historic Houses Association owners, and we are delighted by the HLF’s decision. The festival is a terrific celebration of these landscape treasures and will enable our Members to share the beauty of Brown’s vision, with generations old and new, to be enjoyed as never before.”

Natural England

Liz Newton, Director Landscape and Geodiversity Natural England, says: “Capability Brown has provided us with a legacy of inspiring historic designed landscapes that are great places for people to visit and to see how they contribute to the character of our landscape and natural environment. We are delighted HLF are supporting the Capability Brown 300 Festival in 2016 to help inspire owners, local communities, and visitors

alike to engage with these landscapes, ensuring they are managed for future generations to enjoy.”

HLF support for Capability Brown sites

HLF are supporting various restoration projects at Capability Brown – designed sites, including:

- **Compton Verney, West Midlands** - £2.5million will help restore grounds including a rare, Brown-designed Grade I-listed Chapel
- **Ampthill Great Park, East of England** - £606,800 to restore surviving Capability Brown designed landscape
- **Highcliffe Castle, South West England** - initial support for a £2.86 million bid to help improve Brown-designed parkland

About the Capability Brown Festival

The Capability Brown Festival is a nationwide celebration of the 300th anniversary of the birth of Lancelot ‘Capability’ Brown in 2016. The festival unites 17 partner organisations, in the UK’s largest festival of its kind to date. It is funded with a development grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund, and is managed by the Landscape Institute. The project has two key strands. The first will increase public access to the sites Brown created and advised on. The second strand is dedicated to discovering more about Brown’s work. Further information is available at the [Capability Brown website](#).

About the Landscape Institute.

The Landscape Institute is the royal chartered body for landscape architects. It represents professionals in the UK working across planning, design and the management of urban and rural landscape. The Landscape Institute campaigns to protect conserve and enhance the natural and built environment for public benefit. Through its advocacy programmes it champions landscape, and the landscape profession, in order to inspire great places where people want to live, work and visit. The Landscape Institute manages the Capability Brown Festival on behalf of the Festival partnership. More information is available at the [Landscape Institute website](#).

Further information

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