

CHAPTER 10

‘Chaises, grotto, fishing, all in perfection’: The Social Context of Brown’s Landscape Designs

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A visit to a Brownian landscape today often entails a drive through parkland where the only signs of life are the grazing sheep. They can therefore feel a little sterile. This is at odds with the frequent state of such parks during the eighteenth century, when they were used extensively. While recently there has been much research into the practicalities behind Brown’s working methods, and those of his contemporaries, there is still a tendency to see his works theoretically, in terms of aesthetics. But Brown’s designs were created to be experienced and enjoyed. To a great extent, form followed function and several elements intrinsic to a Brownian design help the modern visitor to understand how they worked and, moreover, why they looked as they did.

One of Brown’s acknowledged skills was as a water engineer and there are examples of boats being built for his lakes, just as they were being created, suggesting that the pleasure of boating was a major reason for the creation of the water body and, moreover, that the scale and shape was also, at least partly, determined by use for boating. Another example is the circulation routes that form a highly structural element in a Brownian landscape. These were created to be experienced in a number of ways. Beyond the visual, the experience was almost visceral and the sensation of speed was an important factor. A third element in the design of the Brownian landscape was the eye-catcher. Often erroneously called ‘follies’, these buildings were far from the displays of extravagant expenditure for no purpose that the term implies. They came in a variety of shapes, sizes, and architectural styles, designed to catch the eye, and frequently included a finely decorated room used for a myriad of purposes; they punctuated vistas and provided both destinations and excuses for stopping points while touring the grounds. This chapter focuses on these three elements: firstly, walks and drives; secondly, water features; and, finally, eye-catchers, as a means to better understanding the social context of the landscape style for which Brown was so renowned. The importance of the use of these three essential ingredients of the designed landscape was succinctly expressed by Brown’s contemporary, Earl Temple of Stowe, in his summary of the ideal occupations of a summer house party: ‘Chaises, grotto, fishing, all in perfection.’² The ‘chaises’

¹ I am grateful to the following people for their help in the preparation of this chapter: David Brown, Jonathan Finch, John Gundill, Karen Lynch, Laura Mayer, John Phibbs, Gary Webb, and Tom Williamson.

² TNA, 30/8/62, f 199.

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refers to carriage driving, fishing is self-explanatory, and the reference to the grotto relates to the use of this eye-catcher for supping and as the focal point of parties and entertainments.

Circulation routes, walks, drives, and rides were fundamental to the Brownian designed landscape. On plan they appear as sinuous lines, often flowing around the whole site, connecting elements and forming the skeleton of the design, on which the rest of the features are fleshed out. In Brown's plan for Bowood of 1763 an outer circuit and a partial inner circuit can be seen, the former running through the densely planted perimeter belt, the latter along the inner edge of the belt, affording regular glimpses between the trees that lined it, and in places travelling over the open grass. Around the house, smaller paths to be negotiated on foot can also be discerned. The primacy of circulation routes in design terms reflects their importance in terms of *being* in the landscape; for the most simple and basic way to experience a park or pleasure ground was to get outside and take a walk in it. This seems such an obvious fact that it is easy to overlook. A walk in the landscape could be a means to many experiences, both social and solitary. For example, Marchioness Grey, who employed Brown at her estate at Wrest in Bedfordshire, was said never to take a quiet walk on her own in the gardens without a book in her pocket.³

Through the second half of the eighteenth century, women became more liberated in terms of walking, but in the period during which Brown was forging his reputation women were not expected to be striding out across the countryside.⁴ However, clothes were slowly becoming more practical. As their husbands abandoned full-skirted coats, often made of fine fabrics like silk and relatively high-heeled shoes, and instead adopted a variation on country work wear, in a hard-wearing broadcloth of brown or green (just as Brown wears in his portrait by Nathaniel Dance), ladies took to wearing riding habits even when not on horseback.⁵ These country clothes are proudly displayed for posterity in the group portrait of the Wedgwood family, by Stubbs of 1780, in which the famous pottery entrepreneur, his sons, and his eldest daughter all wear such practical garments rather than displaying their finery.⁶ However, while a riding habit had become standard dress for a lady, she might still have worn rather less practical, elegant silk slippers on her feet.⁷ Thus, the well-drained, surfaced paths of the pleasure ground were of fundamental importance to ladies as places of year-round exercise and resort in Brown's period. The importance of the walk as a feature of the pleasure ground – especially to women – is illustrated by the example of Frances Irwin at Temple Newsam, Yorkshire, and her gravel path. While what she termed as 'Brownifications' were taking place in 1766, with workmen, their barrows, and their spades creating a 'woeful dirty pickle' she particularly valued her existing gravel walk, which was 'always a resource and very much made use of'.⁸

Though often experienced in a solitary fashion, perhaps by the lady of the house seeking a breath of fresh air, the width of paths allowed the experience to be a social one, providing space for two or three to walk abreast. One excuse for a party to tour the grounds was to 'contrive improvements'. As David Brown and Tom Williamson have stressed, and as Colman and Garrick had their character Sterling point out in *The Clandestine Marriage* (1765), 'The chief pleasure of the country house is to make improvements...'.⁹ So when the gentleman-architect Sanderson Miller took five hours to tour the gardens at Stowe on foot in 1749, and 'Mr Brown' was in the company, it is likely that the unusual length of their walk was down to the presence of two such notable taste-makers in the group.¹⁰ Moreover, as Lord Cobham, creator of the gardens and Brown's first employer, had died just two months before and the estate had been inherited by his nephew, Richard Grenville (later Earl Temple), the alterations of features in the garden would have been high on the agenda.

³ Godber, J. (1968). *The Marchioness Grey of Wrest Park* (p. 27). Bedford: Bedfordshire Historical Record Society.

⁴ Martin, J. (2004). *Wives and daughters* (p. 302). London: Hambledon and London.

⁵ Shulman, N. (2014). *Fashion and gardens* (pp. 30–33). London: The Garden Museum.

⁶ The portrait is set outside in a garden, so the clothes reflect that, but it is interesting to contrast this approach to some similar portraits by Arthur Devis of the 1750s. He often portrayed his sitters outside, but fine silk was still very much in evidence.

⁷ The fashion of the riding habit was further adapted a little later to reference a husband's militia uniform. This was famously initiated by Georgiana, Duchess of Devonshire, during the large encampment at Coxheath, Kent. In this she was followed by a number of fashionable women, including Lady Worsley, who was portrayed in her version of her husband's scarlet South Hampshire Militia uniform by Reynolds in 1776. The painting was commissioned for her stepfather's house of Harewood (Yorks), very soon after Brown had returned to further adapt the lake and not long before Sir Richard Worsley called him in to advise on his own his seat of Appuldurcombe in the Isle of Wight. What is noticeable about Lady Worsley's dress in this portrait is that, while the clothes had become more suitable for striding around a landscape, she still wore elegant silk shoes on her feet. See Rubenhold, H. (2008). *Lady Worsley's whim* (pp. 47–48). London: Chatto and Windus.

⁸ Brown, J. (2012). *Lancelot Brown, the omnipotent magician 1716–1783* (p. 192). London: Chatto and Windus.

⁹ Brown, D. & Williamson, T. (2016). *Lancelot Brown and the Capability Men: Landscape revolution in eighteenth-century England* (p. 189). London: Reaktion Books.

¹⁰ Hawkes, W. (Ed.). (2005). *The diaries of Sanderson Miller of Radway* (p. 65). Stratford: Dugdale Society.

Three years later, Brown was engaged in a professional capacity by Admiral Anson when he acquired Moor Park (Herts) in 1752. The process of improvement was initiated with a tour of the grounds by a 'Council of Taste' and their outing was recorded by Anson's wife, Elizabeth. As well as the owners themselves, the party included William Pitt, another one of the Stowe circle and an experienced amateur designer himself.¹¹ Elizabeth Anson described the tour to her sister-in-law, Marchioness Grey, saying that it:

... would have given you great Entertainment. I walked on Horseback & was attended by the Gentlemen on Foot, whilst we surveyed the Garden, as it is called; afterwards they mounted too, to view the Park: – My Lord acted the Part of Owner – Mr. Anson of a good Cousin ... to shew and puff – Pitt of an Enthusiastic Admirer, & Brown of an Artist who scorned to find difficulties in executing any great or beautiful Idea, & made nothing of raising or levelling any spot to the height desired. – This is a short Sketch of what entertained ... me for about four hours...¹²

As well as being the determined aim of a group touring a designed landscape, in reality, so prevalent was the passion for landscape gardening that the discussion of how a design could be altered to improve it was probably a frequent, unplanned by-product of a walk.

That Elizabeth Anson was mounted for the tour of Moor Park – and the reason for the party – meant that they got further afield than the environs of the house. While many women rode, driving a small carriage, often specific to the designed landscape, was a very popular alternative (Figure 10.1). In the 1750s, even before Brown was called in at Sherborne (Dorset), the ladies of the extended family were driving themselves around the park. In 1758, Lady Ilchester, sister-in-law of the mistress of the house, and a friend 'drove about the park in the chariot'. The Ilchesters' own principal seat was Melbury (also Dorset) and accounts of 1768 record the payment for 'a garden chaise and harness for my ladies use'.¹³

To really appreciate the importance of the driven experience in the Brownian landscape it is necessary to understand the everyday experience of horse-drawn travel at the time. The mid-eighteenth century – the decades in which Brown was forging his reputation – coincided with the start of the greatest period of road building in Britain since the Romans, with newly laid out trunk roads known as 'turnpikes' developed particularly from the 1750s. However, cross-country travel was still fraught with hazards and many places were cut off to carriage access during bad weather, leaving their residents to resort to horseback or foot.

Drives within the designed landscape therefore developed as something of an antidote to the bad roads outside the park boundaries. To understand the importance of this concept to the Georgians it is necessary to strip away our twenty-first century perceptions and experiences: in the mid-eighteenth century to accelerate in a carriage from walking pace to a trot at 8 mph was an exhilarating sensation. To do this on the smooth turf of the landscape park was doubly delightful. This combination of stimulation of many senses at once was a theme of the experience of the Georgian park or garden. A truly great design was one that afforded a sensual experience on a variety of levels at the same time, so a carriage drive was about visual appreciation combined with the excitement of *feeling*. Elsewhere in the park, and at another juncture, this might be combined with the delights of food and drink, or music.

In parallel to new road building, carriages were also becoming better sprung, more comfortable, and, crucially, faster. These were well suited to the smooth turf provided by Brown and his contemporaries within newly improved parks. Two topographical views of landscapes improved by Brown, both by Paul Sandby, illustrate this well. The first is a view of Wakefield Lawn (Northants) of 1767. Here a phaeton, the racy sports car of its time, is driven across the smooth sward by a gentleman (perhaps significantly) with a well-dressed lady seated next to him. With its high driving position, large rear wheels, and two horses, this contrasts with the more old-fashioned, sedate, one-horse garden chaise that Mrs Carter Thelwall is driving in her family portrait (Figure 10.1).

The second view, *Riders in an Avenue in the Park... at Luton*, c. 1765, gives a rare piece of visual evidence for a grass drive, shown in contrast with the surfaced approach to the house.¹⁴ Some internal drives might also be surfaced, but grass drives provided a different experience. In the Luton view the grass is mown shorter than the

¹¹ Symes, M. (1996). William Pitt the Elder: The Gran Mago of landscape gardening. *Garden History*, 24(1), 126–136.

¹² Anson, E. (19 May 1752). [Letter to Grey, Admiralty]. Wrest Park (Lucas) Papers, Bedfordshire Archives & Records Service (BARS), L 30/9/3/33.

¹³ Martin, J. (2004). *Wives and daughters* (p. 295–296).

¹⁴ For an image of this view by Sandby of the grass drive at Luton Hoo, see Felus, K. (2016). *The secret life of the Georgian garden* (p. 36). London: I. B. Tauris.



Figure 10.1: *The Reverend Carter Thelwall and his Family*, George Stubbs, 1776, showing the family riding in a one-horse garden chaise. Copyright The Holburne Museum (2018), reprinted with permission.

main sward and is being enjoyed by a couple in a small carriage and a gentleman on horseback. The pleasure of this experience was summed up in Edmund Burke's definition of beauty, which included being 'swiftly drawn in an easy coach over smooth turf...'¹⁵ An 'open-horse carriage' can also be seen gliding over the smooth turf in Watts's view of Heveningham (Figure 5.5).

Beyond the sensation of gliding and the exhilaration of speed, the visual experience was also important and drives were created to give a series of changing scenes and vistas. Moreover, it should be stated that the sight of a carriage moving along such a drive, perhaps disappearing now and again from view, would have lent an animation to the scene to be enjoyed by anyone viewing the landscape from the reverse point, particularly from the house. Drives could be lengthy and remarkably varied. The circuit drive designed by Brown for the 6th Earl of Coventry at Croome (Worcs) was described as: 'delightful ... skirting the entire bounds ... in a wide circuit of ten miles: interspersed by several collateral branches, of pleasing variety, and different distances. ... The principal ride is sheltered and adorned by fine and flourishing trees ... charming prospects open, in passing...'¹⁶ Here Brown took advantage of the long views across the Vale of Evesham, 'borrowing' the landscape from the

¹⁵ Burke, E. (1756). *A philosophical enquiry into the origin of our ideas of the sublime and the beautiful* (p. 155). London.

¹⁶ Dean, W. (1824). *An historical and descriptive account of Croome D'Abitot, the seat of the Right Hon. the Earl of Coventry...* (p. 78). Worcester: T. Eaton.

Malverns Hills on one side to the Cotswolds on the other, even today leaving the viewer impressed by the seeming extent of the design. In a carriage this would have been even more impressive, the experience different from that had on foot at a slower speed and a lower vantage point.

This description of Croome mentions 'charming prospects opening in passing'; from such drives features of the landscape appeared and disappeared, then re-arranged themselves. The experience must have been somewhat cinematic in an age where moving pictures were almost inconceivable.¹⁷ In the park at Blenheim Palace (Oxon), where Brown worked in the early 1760s, 'the water, the Palace, the gardens, the Great Bridge, the Pillar, Woodstock, and other near and remote objects, open and shut upon the eye like enchantment'.¹⁸ However, the drives here perhaps became too popular and too animated, for some visitors at least. On his 1792 tour, John Byng visited Blenheim; he found the frenetic activity of tourism here too much for his sensibilities and complained of the one-horse chaises and phaetons hired out to tourists hurtling past him through the park. As an antidote he took himself off to the lake for the quieter pursuit of fishing.¹⁹

One of the most prominent features of the park at Blenheim was Brown's master stroke of a lake. As frequently happened in his designs, this replaced an earlier water feature. Often these were stew ponds, which had been features of parks for centuries. The second half of the eighteenth century saw their decline, their rectilinear appearance at odds with the naturalistic park and their scale often too small for the wide-open spaces and long vistas.²⁰ Until then they had been used for fishing for both productive and leisure purposes. Before their decline, towards the start of the eighteenth century, in his *Discourse of Fish and Fish-ponds*, Roger North described the netting of fish as a leisure activity.²¹ In the middle of the century, even as more naturalistic water features were becoming ever more fashionable, landowners were still inviting guests to witness the annual autumn spectacle of draining the lake to manage the fish stocks, as at Wotton Underwood (Bucks), from where George Grenville wrote to his sister Hester Pitt in October 1769: 'we expect a house full of company next week at the fishing of our Lake'.²²

But this method of fishing was in decline and Currie cites the nineteenth century as the period in which freshwater fish for the table ceased. It is likely that the Brownian-style lake both contributed to the decline of fish farming and was also a symptom of it; the decline may already have been happening but the ever-increasing size of Brownian-style lakes made their management by traditional means impossible. Angling instead became a popular occupation in the landscape park.²³ Earl Temple of Stowe was a keen host and each summer would invite parties to his palatial estate. Temple's house parties were documented by many guests, including Horace Walpole and Lady Mary Coke, who described touring the grounds in a chaise and fishing on the lake.²⁴ Angling was as popular with ladies as well as men. Lady Mary fished with Princess Amelia, daughter of George II. They had probably both been taught to fish as children, as it was commonly thought to encourage patience and discourage an interest in more dissolute pastimes (Figure 10.2). At the beginning of the eighteenth century Roger North wrote: 'Young People love Angling extremely; then there is a Boat, which gives pleasure enough in summer...'. He continued that such activities might 'direct the Minds of a numerous Family to terminate in something not inconvenient, and it may divert them from worse'.²⁵

¹⁷ The nearest thing to moving pictures around this date were the panoramic paintings of the French artist Louis Carrogis (1717–1806), known as Carmontelle, who created scenes on translucent rolls of paper that were slowly scrolled past a light which shone through them. Many of his narrative scenes documented the English style gardens of the French aristocracy in the years immediately before the revolution of 1789. They have been called 'the cinema of the Enlightenment'. See Chatel de Brancion, L. (2008). *Carmontelle's landscape transparencies: Cinema of the Enlightenment*. Los Angeles: J. Paul Getty Museum.

¹⁸ Mavor, Revd W. (1787). *Blenheim, a poem: To which is added, a Blenheim guide* (p. 97). London: T. Cadell.

¹⁹ Bruyn Edwards, C. (1954). *The Torrington diaries – A selection from the tours of the Hon. John Byng 1781–1794* (p. 456). London.

²⁰ Currie, C. (1990). Fishponds as garden features, c. 1550–1750. *Garden History*, 18(1), 22–46.

²¹ North, R. (1713). *A discourse of fish and fish-ponds* (p. 72). London.

²² Birdwood, V. (Ed.). (1994). *So dearly loved, so much admired: Letters to Hester Pitt, Lady Chatham, from her relations and friends* (p. 38). London: HMSO.

²³ The catching of fish with rod and line had first been popularised by Isaac Walton in *The compleat angler* of 1653. In 1655 he met Charles Cotton, who was forty years his junior. The latter contributed to widening of the scope of the book and it became a bible for fishermen, a work of reference the influence of which was akin to that of Evelyn's *Sylva*.

²⁴ Home, J. A. (Ed.). (1889) *The letters and journals of Lady Mary Coke* (Vol. 3, p. 252). Edinburgh: David Douglas.

²⁵ North, R. (1713). *A discourse of fish and fish-ponds* (p. 72).



Figure 10.2: *The Grotto and the Temple of Contemplation, Stowe*, J. B. Chatelain, 1752. Source: Yale Center for British Art, Paul Mellon Collection.

To interact even more directly with this fundamental element in the landscape, one could get out onto the water, to row or sail. The depictions of boats in engravings and paintings such as Turner's view of Harewood (Figure 6.6) or on plans, such as that for Brown's park at Redgrave in Suffolk,²⁶ was not merely artistic licence; they reflected real experiences and boats were an intrinsic element of the park or pleasure ground. As Humphry Repton wrote a little later, 'a large lake without boats is a dreary waste of water'.²⁷ In the eighteenth century the general population and the land-owning classes in particular had much direct experience of waterborne transport and travel. Many had brothers or cousins in the Royal Navy, as it was a common career for younger sons not destined to inherit an estate. Others had connections with mercantile trade. In London, where many wealthy families spent much of their year, the Thames was still the main thoroughfare of the city, as well as the scene of pageants and festivals. This knowledge and experience had an influence on the variety of craft on lakes in designed landscapes and in their use, as with carriage drives, sensation was key to the experience.²⁸

In Brown's *oeuvre* there are enough examples of boats being constructed at the same time as lakes were being created (or adapted) to be persuasive that better boating was a fundamental reason for this. In 1766, a Bedfordshire newspaper reported: 'the Earl of Bute has lately engaged some Ship-carpenters to build, from the timber of his estate, the model of a first rate man of war, with a view to adorn the extensive canal now making at his Lordship's seat at Luton Hoo'.²⁹ At Stowe a similar vessel was described by Benton Seeley in his guidebook to the garden as: 'a Model Man of War in all her Rigging'. She is seen in the background of an engraving showing the view across the Home Park and Eleven Acre Lake to the Temple of Venus (Figure 10.3). This vessel, one of a number of relatively well-documented craft used on the lakes at Stowe, was consistently mentioned in the estate accounts, where it was known simply as 'the ship'.³⁰

²⁶ Brown, D. & Williamson, T. (2016). *Lancelot Brown and the Capability Men* (p. 122).

²⁷ Repton, H. (1794). *Sketches and hints on landscape gardening* (p. 41). London: Bulmer.

²⁸ Felus, K. (2006). Boats and boating in the designed landscape, 1720–1820. *Garden History*, 34(1), 22–46.

²⁹ Blaydes, F. A. (Ed.). (1886). *Bedfordshire Notes & Queries* (Vol. 1, p. 47). Bedford: A. Ransom etc.

³⁰ Felus, K. (2006). Boats and boating in the designed landscape.



Figure 10.3: Detail of *The View from the Temple Wood Building, at Stowe*, engraved by J. Couse, after George Bickham, c. 1750s, showing 'a Model Man of War' on Eleven Acre Lake. © Victoria and Albert Museum, London. Reproduced with permission.

There was also a 'ship' at the Grenville's other estate of Wotton Underwood. Of this vessel no visual clues survive, but it is documented in the accounts. As at Stowe the 'ship' here was one of many craft and clearly distinct from a mere 'boat'. At Wotton, Brown augmented an existing lake, creating a second, impressively larger sheet of water of 40 acres, which gave scope for more exciting waterborne activities. The estate accounts make reference to 'ships canon', the estate map of 1789 plotted a battery and dock, and visitors reported 'a large vessel' moored at one end of 'the amazing sheet of water',³¹ all of which suggests the use of the lake for mock naval battles, known as 'naumachia'.

Naumachia in the English designed landscape seem to have been a phenomenon of the 1750s to 1770s particularly.³² This timing – coinciding directly with Brown's career – raises the question of how many of the water bodies created in this heyday of lake expansion and stream-damming were intended for such use. There are three likely reasons for this fashion for naumachia. Firstly, they were conscious emulations of much larger mock naval battles that took place in classical Rome, the largest of which was staged on Lake Fucino in AD 52 and involved 19,000 combatants. Secondly, they referenced British naval supremacy, perhaps involving an element of re-enactment. Finally, they were perhaps a means of training younger sons destined for naval careers, especially in landlocked counties with no access to the sea on which to learn to sail (Figure 10.4).³³ One such younger son was the 5th Lord Byron, who had enjoyed a naval career before unexpectedly inheriting his estate at Newstead Abbey in Nottinghamshire.³⁴ Here, in 1749, he adapted the monastic fish ponds to become a series of larger lakes and built a fleet of boats, including a twenty-gun schooner and also a pair of miniature

³¹ Felus, K. (2009). The social history of the designed landscape at Wotton. *New Arcadian Journal*, 65/66, 106–107.

³² Cousins, M. & Eyres, P. (1995). Naumachia: The parkland phenomenon of mock naval battle. *New Arcadian Journal*, 39/40, 11–29.

³³ Felus, K. (2016). *The secret life of the Georgian garden* (p. 65).

³⁴ William Byron, also known as 'The Devil Byron' after he killed his cousin in a duel. His brother Vice-Admiral John Byron, known as 'Foulweather Jack', was also in the Royal Navy and was one of the survivors of Admiral Anson's gruelling circumnavigation of 1740–44.



Figure 10.4: Detail from the painted panels in the house at Batchacre, Staffs, unknown artist, c. 1760s. Photo: Clare Hickman, reproduced courtesy of John Wilcox.

forts on the shore. The developments at Newstead are perhaps the earliest examples of the trend of lake expansion for waterborne war games, created – perhaps significantly – at exactly the time that Brown was about to leave Stowe to begin his freelance career. As well as the ‘model man of war’ at Stowe, which was in existence by 1750 (soon after Earl Temple inherited), other early examples include the fleet and fort at Stowe’s rival Buckinghamshire estate of West Wycombe, in existence by the early 1750s, and that at the lost landscape of Batchacre (Staffs) laid out by the retired Admiral Whitworth, c. 1756. While Brown did not work at Newstead, West Wycombe, or Batchacre, these large lakes – and the activities that took place on them – may have influenced him and the desires of his clients.

Naumachia were probably exclusively male preserves, but a pleasure jaunt on a boat might be entertainment for the whole family. Brown’s adaptation, in around 1760, of the formal canals around the outside of the (mainly) 1710s garden at Wrest enabled more interesting boating than had been possible previously. As early as the 1750s there had been both plans for altering the water and for the making of a boat. This was recorded in letters between Marchioness Grey and her sister-in-law, Elizabeth, who had fortuitously married Admiral George Anson; naturally he was consulted on the best sort of vessel for the ‘navigation’. But the boat discussed in 1750 also had to be capable of ornament as it was to be used as a kind of ‘pretty moving summerhouse’ where letters could be read and written.³⁵

Whether this particular boat was indeed built is not known, but the designs for one that was certainly constructed in 1765 have survived.³⁶ By this date Marchioness Grey was the mother of two daughters, Annabel, who was fourteen and Mary, nine. It may have been at least partly to entertain them that the boat was constructed. Annabel wrote a vivid description of its maiden voyage:

³⁵ Felus, K. (2006). Boats and boating in the designed landscape (pp. 35–36).

³⁶ Wrest Park (Lucas) Papers, BARS, L33/125. For illustration see Felus, K. (2006). Boats and boating in the designed landscape (p. 37).

This Ship ... had long lain near the water side an object of Admiration to all ... who were we suppose particularly struck with the swan at one end, & the tiger at the other. Having now received her last finishing, it was determined she should be launched the first fair hour. Accordingly at six o'clock in the evening ... she was let down into the water, colours and streamers flying, music playing ... She came down, literally, Head foremost, & with such a splash ... but recovering instantly, & not sticking in the mud ... she was brought along shore, we embarked under the shade of the Acacias & had a most prosperous voyage. The sun shone ... the water & shores looked more beautiful than ever. ... Having passed every straight & doubled every cape without the least accident, & being arrived at the open sea behind the pavilion, we landed under a clump (which I should have called a Wood) & left the vessel to proceed to its moorings...³⁷

Later, when Mary's own sons were staying with their grandmother at Wrest in the summers of the early 1790s, the Marchioness acquired another new boat, again perhaps to amuse the children. The eldest, nine-year-old Thomas Robinson, wrote to his uncle in September 1790, saying: 'Grandmama has got a great boat which we saw launched on Monday; it was afterwards brought to the bank we all have been aboard of her and fished in her'.³⁸

The activities of boating and fishing often occasioned specific architecture in the landscape. The apogee of this was perhaps Robert Adam's Fishing Pavilion at Kedleston (Derbys) of 1770–72. Here, on the bank of the lake, he combined a fine room for dining, for card games, and from which to dangle a fishing rod, with a cold bath, changing room, and earth closet in the lower storey, flanked by a pair of lake-level boat houses. The pavilion had its own enclosed garden and acted as an eye-catcher from other points in the park. Many such eye-catchers were used for a myriad of different purposes, frequently combined with each other as at Kedleston. Their distant location often meant that they were linked by the circuit drive and became both stopping-off points and destinations. With all the facilities many provided, they were resorts in their own right, places to go and spend time. Although the use of such solidly built eye-catchers declined in Brown's own work as his career progressed, they continued to be much in evidence in the work of other contemporary designers, such as Richard Woods,³⁹ and were still being used by Humphry Repton, whose career as a landscaper began five years after Brown's death.⁴⁰ Although Brown gradually moved away from including these permanent structures, is it not clear how many of his later, more minimal designs might have included a tent, of which no trace remains. They have an almost ghostly presence in many designed landscapes, which belies their significance in terms of design and use; we will return to them later.⁴¹

The continued popularity of the eye-catcher throughout the eighteenth century had much to do with the contrast they provided to the architecture and life of the country house in this period. As Amanda Vickery has observed, the Palladian mansion was well 'suited to the sunshine of the Veneto' but 'ill adapted to the damp of Albion' and its interiors could be cold, impersonal spaces in which to live.⁴² The eye-catcher, on the other hand, provided a more intimate space, on a human scale and encouraged more personal parties of fewer guests. This was again in contrast to the crowded, bustling mansion, full of servants, poor relations, and uninvited guests. Brown's early patron, Lord Coventry, complained that his house at Croome was 'an inn' due to 'the hospitality my ancestors exercised for some generations ... [which] makes it impossible for me to effect any privacy or retirement'.⁴³ It is no coincidence that he erected a number of garden buildings to which he could escape.

The closest eye-catcher to the house was the Rotunda in the Home Shrubbery. It was designed by Brown and 'fitted as an evening apartment', suggesting the drinking of tea and perhaps music, as well as the simple pleasure of taking the view from its panoramic windows, or solitary pursuits such as reading a book.⁴⁴ Other buildings at Croome with rooms for use were designed by Robert Adam. The Temple Greenhouse, with its sunny, south-facing prospect, was a longer walk from the house but always guaranteed warmth due to its hypocaust and was described as a 'summer apartment'. The Earl also created a menagerie for his second wife. Though he

³⁷ Polwarth, Annabel (29 July 1766). [Letter to Talbot, Catherine]. Wrest Park (Lucas) Papers, BARS, L 30/21/2.

³⁸ West Devon Record Office, Morley papers, 1259/1/219.

³⁹ Cowell, F. (2009). *Richard Woods (1715–1793): Master of the pleasure garden*. Woodbridge: Boydell.

⁴⁰ Daniels, S. (2000). *Humphry Repton: Landscape gardening and the geography of Georgian England*. New Haven: Yale.

⁴¹ This is a question which warrants more research.

⁴² Vickery, A. (2010). *Behind closed doors: At home in Georgian England* (p. 147). New Haven: Yale University Press.

⁴³ Dickens, L. & Stanton, M. (Eds.) (1910). *An eighteenth century correspondence* (p. 162). London: John Murray; Lord Coventry, then Lord Deerhurst, to Sanderson Miller, February 1750.

⁴⁴ Dean, W. (1824). *An historical and descriptive account of Croome D'Abitot*.

never realised Adam's ambitious, later plan for a rectangular enclosure of cages with a grand, two-storey dining pavilion, the original menagerie did include a room for taking tea.⁴⁵ With a long circuit of ten miles, there was clearly a need for places to stop, rest, and be refreshed, especially if a party was out for four or five hours, perhaps also 'contriving improvements'.

Adam's unexecuted design for the menagerie at Croome would have included a number of different spaces for different uses within the central pavilion. In this it was typical of other such buildings within landscapes on which Brown worked such as the menagerie at Audley End (Essex). Built in 1774, in the gothic taste, it was a tripartite building with a kitchen, tea room, and 'keeping room', which either housed the smaller song birds in the collection, or provided a room for the keeper. In an enclosure outside larger birds were kept, including gold and silver pheasants, 'exotic fowl', and 'curious pigeons'. An inventory of 1797 noted that, along with equipment and furniture necessary for tea making and drinking, the tea room also contained a writing case and a number of the latest publications on natural history, suggesting the room as a location for relevant and related studies.⁴⁶

At Highclere (Hants), the location of the rotunda, now called the Temple of Diana, is noted on Brown's surviving plan for the improvement of the estate (early 1770s), although it is not known if he was involved in the creation of the building. When the temple was altered in the 1840s, the architect Charles Barry made a plan of its internal layout, which shows that below the upper 'belvedere room' there was a lower storey containing an earth closet, a bedroom, and a kitchen.⁴⁷ Many ornamental buildings in the parks and gardens at which Brown worked included kitchens; whatever else the activities that were enjoyed by an owner and his guests, refreshments were core to the experience. In this they were adding the pleasures of taste to the other levels of sensation offered by the designed landscape. Such buildings where food and drink were served were often equipped with highly fashionable oriental ceramics – appropriate vessels in which and with which to serve tea.⁴⁸ This was by far the most commonly consumed refreshment taken outside and while, at the time in which Brown was working, imports of tea were on the rise, making it more affordable, it was still an exotic drink redolent of the mysteries and attraction of the East.⁴⁹ The taking of tea in the garden in this period is perhaps best depicted by the pair of canvases by Zoffany of the garden of the actor David Garrick, at Hampton (Middx), complete with his newly finished Temple to Shakespeare. In one view a servant appears around the corner of the building carrying a tray of tea, while Garrick's young nephew peeps cheekily around a column (Figure 10.5). In the opposite view, Mr and Mrs Garrick and a guest are seated at a tea table on the lawn with a servant standing behind, while Garrick's brother fishes in the Thames.⁵⁰ The chairs on which the tea party sits are unexpectedly fine for outdoor furniture of the time and it is possible that the artist moved an activity that commonly took place inside the temple outside onto the lawn, in order to depict it more easily and also to illustrate more of the garden.⁵¹ The temple – which survives – is surprisingly capacious inside and could cater for relatively large parties.⁵² It also has good acoustics and, given Garrick's connection with the theatre and the fact that his wife had been a dancer, it is likely that musical parties were held here.

Music in the pleasure ground was another way to please the senses. Sometimes concerts were planned, but often it was spontaneous. Sometimes they took place inside an eye-catcher, but equally could be in the open air. In July 1756, after a walk around the garden at Stowe, Sanderson Miller noted in his diary: 'singing at Grecian temple', a reference to the Temple of Concord and Victory.⁵³ Miller was a member of the Oxford Catch Club, and it is likely that the sort of songs sung would have been these part songs or pastoral folk songs. The Earl of Exeter, at Burghley, was one of Lancelot Brown's longest standing clients, as well as a keen musician and

⁴⁵ Gordon, K. (2000). *Coventrys of Croome* (pp. 124–125). Chichester: Philimore and National Trust.

⁴⁶ Sutherill, M. (1996). The garden buildings at Audley End. *The Georgian Group Journal*, 6, 102–119.

⁴⁷ Mowl, T. (2016). *The historic gardens of Hampshire* (p. 111). London: Stephen Morris.

⁴⁸ For example, the Bowling Green House at Wrest Park; from inventory evidence of 1740 we know that the 'handsome banqueting room' contained all the necessary accoutrements for making and serving tea and coffee. In a closet were two corner cupboards decorated in the Eastern taste 'with Indian Pictures'. They contained: 'A colour'd China Tea Pot and Stand', teacups and saucers, coffee cups, two slop basons, a sugar dish, a milk porringer, a spoon boat and 'Six gilt Silver Tea Spoons in Shagreen Case'.

⁴⁹ Day, I. (2000). *Eat, drink and be merry* (pp. 112–119). London: Philip Wilson.

⁵⁰ There were actually at least two other views of the garden by Zoffany, one with David Garrick sitting under a tree reading or writing. Another depicted the actor's nieces in the view of the river from the opening of the tunnel under the road, which separated the main garden around the house from the lawn and temple next to the Thames. There is also a second version of the view of the Temple to Shakespeare, but without the servant bringing tea.

⁵¹ Green- or grey-painted Windsor chairs were more commonly used outside, as can be seen, for example, in Zoffany's later group portrait of *Thomas Rosoman and His Family* (1781), in which the Temple to Shakespeare appears in the background.

⁵² Today concerts are regularly held at the temple, during which it seats 30–40 people.

⁵³ Hawkes, W. (2005). *The diaries of Sanderson Miller of Radway* (p. 242).



Figure 10.5: *The Shakespeare Temple at Hampton House with Mr and Mrs David Garrick*, Johann Zoffany, 1762. Copyright Sotheby's. Reproduced with permission.

an enthusiastic patron of music. When visitor Henry Bates toured the grounds in July 1778, he noted that the party 'stopped at every new opening to a fine prospect and the company sang catches and were in the highest spirits', again suggesting spontaneity.⁵⁴

Other musical instruments that were popularly used in the park and pleasure ground had the advantage of being easily portable, such as the flute (which Miller also played), the oboe, which was thought to be particularly well suited to the open air, and the French horn, as its sound travelled well and the instrument had hunting connotations.⁵⁵ Sometimes musicians, especially playing the latter instrument, were hidden from view to add an air of enchantment. Elizabeth Montagu described how William Pitt, while staying in Kent, had found a captivating scene on his morning's ride and later in the day had taken a party back to the spot, where he 'ordered a tent to be pitched, tea to be prepared and his French horn to breathe music like the unseen genius of the wood'.⁵⁶

This little vignette also demonstrates the flexibility of the tent. It could be raised at a specific spot, literally on a whim. It could be moved around as an owner pleased and, when present in the landscape, had the same effect and

⁵⁴ I am grateful to Jon Culverhouse, archivist at Burghley, for this reference.

⁵⁵ Felus, K. (2016). *The secret life of the Georgian garden* (pp. 181–189).

⁵⁶ Ayling, S. (1976). *The elder Pitt* (p. 106). London: Collins.



Figure 10.6: Detail of *Southill, in Bedfordshire. The Seat of the Right Honourable Lord Viscount Torrington*, from *The Seats of the Nobility and Gentry*, William Watts, 1779–86. Showing a framed canvas tent used for entertainment. Photo copyright Kate Felus, CC BY-NC 4.0.

purpose as more solidly built eye-catchers. Often light-coloured, sometimes striped, they caught the light and stood out against the verdure of the landscape (Figure 10.6).⁵⁷ They were also, as Pitt clearly knew, perfect places to serve refreshments, such as tea.⁵⁸ Tents are, in many ways, the ghosts of the landscape park and garden, their fabric having long-since perished, leaving almost no trace, in contrast to permanent structures, which, even where allowed to fall into ruin, present far more clues as to their past existence.⁵⁹ With tents the only hint as to their presence is often merely a levelled platform or a remnant place name, such as Tent Hill at Highclere.

⁵⁷ A striped tent with no sides (they may have been detachable) and striped poles is shown in the Elysium Garden at Audley End by Tomkins, c. 1788. The painting is still in the house there. It may be the 'tent pleasure Marquee' supplied by Messrs Trotter in August 1783. See Sutherill, M. (1997). The buildings of the Elysium Garden at Audley End. *The Georgian Group Journal*, 7, 94–104 (pp. 100, 104).

⁵⁸ Felus, K. (2016). *The secret life of the Georgian garden* (pp. 48–49).

⁵⁹ The closest survival today is the Chinese Pavilion at Boughton (Northants). Although not a conventional canvas tent, the Chinese Pavilion is a unique survival of an original eighteenth-century demountable building. Unlike many of the other examples known now only from illustrations which were made of canvas, the Boughton Pavilion is constructed of canvas oil cloth and light wooden lattice work. Its precise origin is unknown and the earliest references to it date back to the 1809, but analysis of its fabric suggests that it was made in the late-eighteenth century. It had been repaired many times during its life and is now painted black, although the Regency scheme was probably more colourful. During the nineteenth century the building was kept at Montagu House in London, erected every year in spring and disassembled in the autumn. See Bowden-Smith, R. (1988). *The Chinese Pavilion, Boughton House, Northamptonshire*. Woodbridge: Avenue Books.



Figure 10.7: *Design for illuminations to celebrate the birthday of George III*, Cipriani and Adam, 1763. © Victoria and Albert Museum, London. Reproduced with permission.

Tents were also frequently used when it came to mass entertainments, as they could be large enough to shelter many people and were easily erected, temporary features in the landscape, as well as being potentially decorative. For the coming-of-age celebrations of William Beckford, staged at Fonthill (Wilts) in 1781, large tents or marquees served as the location for the dinner of the local farmers and ‘substantial tradesmen’, while other elements of the entertainment spread out across the park in front of the house.⁶⁰ One of the great advantages of the open expanses of a Brownian-style lawn was its ability to hold many people for events such as celebrations of victories, birthdays, and the coming of age of the heir to the estate (Figure 10.7). At Stowe Earl Temple regularly entertained in the gardens. The earliest detailed description from his period recounts the events staged to celebrate the victory of Louisburg in 1758 during the Seven Years War. George Grenville described how a bonfire was lit on the high ground, the grotto was illuminated, and fireworks were set off, all accompanied by the ringing of bells. There was a small family party present, but the ‘multitudes in the Garden passed numbering’.⁶¹ If this event was like others then ‘the multitudes’ could have run into thousands of people.

During what Earl Temple termed his ‘fêtes champêtre nocturne’, the Grotto (Figure 10.2, above), at the head of the Alder River in the Elysian Fields, was always the centre of the entertainment, hence the third element of his succinct summary of the ideal summer party: ‘Chaises, grotto, fishing, all in perfection’.⁶² At such times,

⁶⁰ Melville, L. (Ed.). (1910). *The life and letters of William Beckford of Fonthill* (pp. 121–122). London: William Heinemann.

⁶¹ George Grenville to Hester Pitt, undated letter, probably summer 1758, Public Record Office 30/8/34 f 17.

⁶² Earl Temple’s term for night-time entertainments at Stowe: PRO 30/8/61 ff 132–135.

the most prestigious guests were fed and watered in the building, which was illuminated, as was a boat on the lake beyond, on which the musicians were seated. The trees were also hung with strings of lights. In 1778, visitor William Bray described the Grotto as 'faced with flints and pebbles', continuing that this was where 'Lord Temple sometimes sups. On such occasions this grove is illuminated with a great number of lamps; and his Lordship with a benevolence which does him honour, permits the neighbourhood to share the pleasure of the evening with him and his company; the park-gates being thrown open'. A good reason for such an entertainment was a royal visit, such as the two made by Princess Amelia, who was entertained in 1764 and 1770. On the earlier occasion Lady Temple's maid recounted how the weather had prevented a garden entertainment occurring for some days at the start of the visit, but, as soon as the rain cleared up, the host ordered the scene to be prepared. Princess Amelia walked down to the Grotto at half past ten and took in the scene, walked a little in the gardens, then returned to the Grotto to 'an elegant cold supper'. Lady Temple's maid reported: 'nothing was seen but lights and people, nothing was heard but music and fireworks, and nothing was felt but joy and happiness'. She estimated that there were over a thousand people in the gardens to see the illuminations, many presumably also hoping to catch a glimpse of the royal family.⁶³ Stowe was not unusual in this scale of entertainment. Beckford's celebrations in 1781 included 10,000 guests; for the coming of age of Lord Morpeth at Castle Howard (Yorks) in 1794, 12,000 were reported; and, on a typically ducal scale, the park at Chatsworth held 30,000 people for a similar celebration for the Marquess of Hartington in 1811.⁶⁴

In their final chapter of *Lancelot Brown and the Capability Men* Brown and Williamson observe that it is impossible to experience these landscapes as our Georgian ancestors would have done, writing: 'there are few places where we can really experience a landscape created by Brown or his fellows in anything like its original condition, or – perhaps more accurately in anything like the form which they intended the landscape to take, when mature'.⁶⁵ Of course, this is true of the visual experience of the space and scale of the landscape, which has changed as trees have grown, woods expanded, or lakes silted over time. But perhaps there are elements of the experience of the landscape available to us that are similar to those of our Georgian ancestors, and perhaps more so than we might at first imagine. Many people have a sense – if somewhat hazy – of what the leisured classes did in the designed landscape in the eighteenth century, though there is seldom enough interpretation to help the modern visitor understand how much they are walking in the footsteps of their forebears. The tradition of entertainment in the designed landscape – a park full of crowds, enjoying food, drink, music, and fireworks is not one that is alien to us in the twenty-first century; today concerts featuring all these elements and known as 'Battle Proms' are regularly staged in summer at some of Brown's most iconic landscapes, including Blenheim, Burghley, and Highclere. The flypast of the Spitfire might be anachronistic, but the music and fireworks are not. Quieter pursuits such as a picnic, or merely a simple walk, are common and easily accomplished. Where we have more difficulty in appreciating what the experience might have been like two to three hundred years ago is in motion in the landscape: riding, driving, and boating. The celebrations of Brown's tercentenary in 2016 occasioned more opportunities to do these things, with carriage drives available at Blenheim and Belvoir (Leics) and the Victorian steam-yacht recommissioned on Brown's lake at Harewood (Yorks). It would be a fitting legacy indeed if these opportunities continued to be open to visitors rather than fading away as time passes once again. This chapter opened with the observation that Brown's landscapes can be sterile, but this need not be the case; it is through living in these landscapes that we keep these works of art vibrant for the future.

Select Bibliography

A select bibliography is available at the end of this volume, or at: <https://doi.org/10.22599/CapabilityBrown.o>.

⁶³ Smith, W. J. (1852). *The Grenville papers* (Vol. 2, p. 408). London: John Murray.

⁶⁴ For Castle Howard see Morley papers, West Devon Record Office, 1259/2/217. For Chatsworth, see *Derby Times*, 28 May 1811.

⁶⁵ Brown, D. & Williamson, T. (2016). *Lancelot Brown and the Capability Men* (p. 230).