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 Capability Brown and his
 account book



Cover illustration:

A page from Capability Brown's account book, showing details of transactions with King George III during 1777–1787.

Occasional Papers from

The RHS Lindley Library Volume 14, October 2016

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Capability Brown and his account book

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People, places and payments: Lancelot Brown's account book

DAVID BROWN

c/o The RHS Lindley Library, The Royal Horticultural Society, London

The surviving account book of Lancelot Brown's business provides a fascinating insight into the working systems of the most successful landscape improvement business of the second half of the eighteenth century. Despite Brown's fame, most people have only a vague idea of what he did, or more importantly for the present purpose, how he did it. What the account book held in the Lindley Library of the RHS gives us is some details of how Brown and his associated craftsmen managed to improve over two hundred parks in the space of just over three decades.

The account book reminds us that Brown lived in a time of expanding commerce, increasing affluence at the upper end of society, and snowballing demand for consumer goods and services. Brown primarily serviced the pinnacle of society, the movers and shakers of the time: the government, the court, the super-rich and their direct patronage networks. It is clear from an assessment of Brown's annual receipts shown in his account ledgers at Drummonds Bank from 1753 to 1783 that he was the head of what would now be seen as a large corporate architectural practice, such as Foster and Partners.¹ Brown's team of surveyors, estimators, draughtsmen, on-site clerks of works and sub-contractors often themselves headed up large teams of tradesmen or labourers. The scale of some of the projects required teams of up to one hundred labourers, and Brown's "associates" would often recruit and supply the necessary people. Contemporary references to Brown's associates use "foreman", "Brown's man", "surveyor", "gardener" and sometimes even "servant". I will employ "associate" for the purposes of this paper and let the accounts along with other references reveal the various roles performed.

In recent years there has been a growth of interest in the mechanics of Brown's business: how it was organised, how it was managed and how it maintained the quality of its product. In addition to the plans, estate

¹ For more detail on the scale of Brown's activity and its modern monetary equivalence see the article by Roderick Floud included within this volume. I am indebted to him for his assistance during the preparation of this text.

accounts and correspondence held for individual sites in record offices and private collections, there are contemporary commentaries and later secondary sources which have historically influenced our understanding of his work. There are, of course, the sites themselves, and more forensic, archaeological approaches (notably Lidar imaging) to understanding them have become increasingly useful and revealing. However, the most important documents providing details of his business are without doubt his surviving account book in the Lindley Library and his, and some of his clients', bank accounts at Drummonds Bank.¹

The two sets of account information provide different but complementary information. For instance, the Lindley Library account shows payments from General Keppel amounting to £1,460 from 4 October 1765 through to the final “balance of the contract” payment on 21 January 1769. This has traditionally been attributed to work at Elveden, Norfolk, the estate which Admiral Augustus Keppel purchased in 1768. A detailed review of bank account ledgers at Drummonds Bank and at Hoare’s Bank for the years 1760–1784, which I undertook in the 1990s, reveals that that precise sum was paid out by General William Keppel of Dyrham Park, Herts, in the same interim payments. Additionally, the Keppel account at Drummonds Bank shows a further payment on 11 December 1772 to William Ireland of £13. 3s. 6d. This may indicate that Ireland directed the work at Dyrham Park. William Ireland is a known associate of Brown and is mentioned several times in the Lindley Library account; at Burleigh, Cambs; Stapleford Park, Leics; and, at Trentham, Staffs. From 1768 to Brown’s death in 1783 he also received regular payments shown in the Drummonds accounts; generally, of between £500 and £700 per annum, with a peak of £940 in 1771. The mention of Ireland in the Trentham account is interesting:

1779 June the 9th deliverd in an act: to his Lordship of
 the Work done under the direction of Ireland. Which
 is the litteral disbursement without any advantage
 what so ever of _____ £509:2:10

¹ The folios of Brown’s account at Drummonds Bank can now be accessed online by application to the Royal Bank of Scotland Archives Section. I am grateful for their assistance with my research over many years.

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Fig. 1. One of Brown's earliest commissions: his completed work at Warwick Castle as painted by Francis Harding in c.1764.

The mention of “without any advantage” indicates some sensitivity perhaps regarding Brown’s mark-up on Ireland’s costs. Brown had previously been accused of making an excessive mark-up on labour rates for Peper Harow in 1763.¹ Contractual disagreements, it seems, were as normal in Brown’s day as they are today. The Lindley Library account contains several examples of disputes, the famous and oft-quoted one being the bill for Alexander Knox’s “Extra Work” at Branches for Ambrose Dickens. The client was happy to pay the agreed sum in full but jibbed at “extras”. The account states that

Mr Brown could not get the money for the Extra Work & tore the Acct. before Mr Dickens face & said his say upon the Business to him.

The disputed sum was £58. 1s. 8d. above an agreed contract sum of £1500. 0s. 0d., which had been paid. Brown could afford his bit of theatre. Elsewhere, Lapidge notes for Trentham:

Lord Gower says he settled & Paid this Account to Mr Brown himself and looking over M^r Drummond’s Rec^{ts}. I find one dated Feb^y the 8 – 1781 – for 380 £ & wrote upon Lord Gowers _____
So suppose the Account was omitted to be X^d out.

There are various references to more detailed accounts, for instance Andrew Gardiner’s bill for his work at Sandbeck in 1766 is referred to and disbursements by various assistants including George Bowstreed at Southill and at Wimbledon are also mentioned. Site records of labour and materials must have been maintained by the various associates employed by Brown, and these clearly existed at the time, but unfortunately these bills have not survived.

The use of the term “disbursement” is also significant, indicating purchases of materials and labour directly for Brown rather than a contractor’s “expenses”. Against this, the separate direct payment to Ireland by Keppel in 1772 shown in the Drummonds account indicates an ambiguous, and

¹ RIBA: Papers of Sir William Chambers, 1752–1795 CHA.2, Middleton to Chambers from Peper Harow 25 July 1763. I am grateful to John Phibbs for drawing this to my attention.

probably flexible, relationship between the client, Brown and his associate on site. Brown may have met Ireland at Aske Park, near Richmond, as Laurence Dundas, “the nabob of the North”, paid £652. 14s. 7d. to a William Ireland on 20 April 1765 according to his account at Drummonds Bank. Brown was at Aske in September 1769 meeting with the local surveyor, George Jackson (Shields, 2016). It is equally possible that the payment by Dundas to Ireland referred to work at Moor Park, Herts, which Dundas purchased in 1763 and where Brown had worked for the previous owner, Admiral George Anson. Even more intriguing is a payment by the executors of John Philips of Heath House, Tean, Staffs in 1776; Philips had died in 1772 and with the slow payments that often applied back then it could apply to work carried out before 1768. Nevertheless, it was for a substantial amount, £489. 8s. 0d., and could represent major work on the park there.¹ Ireland worked at Newnham Paddox for the 6th Earl of Denbigh in 1784², where Brown had worked early in his career. Ireland also worked with Samuel Lapidge after Brown's death at several sites and both worked for Humphry Repton at Bulstrode Park, Bucks. William Ireland finally settled as Gardener for Samuel Whitbread at Southill, Beds, dying there in 1824.³

There are several hands writing in the Lindley Library account book and Samuel Lapidge along with Brown are the major contributors. It is perhaps not surprising then that Brown bequeathed Lapidge, “who knows my accounts”, one hundred guineas in his will and charged him with completing all unfinished contracts. Brown was also godfather to Lapidge's son and both lived at Hampton Court. Lapidge, born 1741 in Old Windsor, came from a nursery family and married into the Lowe family, nurserymen and also of Hampton Court. He was therefore well connected, experienced and knowledgeable in the running of a business, an ideal lieutenant for Brown's busy practice. He was also trained as a surveyor and he carried out a number of surveys recorded in the Lindley Library account. Lapidge first appears in the Drummonds ledgers for 1767 with a small payment of £20 and then again in 1769 with another

¹ A/C James Garth & John Bayne Garforth Esq, Extors of John Phillips Esq. at Drummonds 1776, 1st Mar: “To cash paid Wm. Ireland £489-8”.

² A/C The Earl of Hapsburgh & Denbigh, at Drummonds Bank, 1784, 16th Jul, “To cash paid Wm. Ireland £14-11”.

³ Public Record Office, Prerogative Court of Canterbury, PROB 11: Will Registers Quire Nos. 301–350 (1824).

relatively small payment of £94. From 1772 onwards he is paid variable amounts but largely in the £200–£400 range. For comparison, many of Brown's more ambitious associates would charge out at one guinea per day after leaving Brown, this when a garden labourer might be paid one shilling a day, one shilling and sixpence if skilled. This indicates that the payments to Lapidge are likely to be for his services alone, rather than disbursements for materials and labour for Brown's works. He also clearly kept track of Brown's accounts and collected outstanding fees, especially after Brown's death. For example, at Byram, Yorks:

July 1782 A Survey of Byram by John Spyers containing
 373 Acres – a fair & neat Drawing made of it with
 Proper References to the Contents – at one Shilling
 P^r. Acre including M^r Spyers' Expenses _____ 18-13-0
 A General Plan for the Alteration of the
 Place sent to Byram in Dec 1782 _____
 A Journey to Byram myself in 1782
 Received for and Paid to the Executors by me
 [Signed: Samuel Lapidge]

The above entry in the Lindley Library account is all in the same hand, including Lapidge's signature. It raises an important question regarding the entries in the account book: when an entry refers to "myself" or "my journeys" does it mean Brown or Lapidge? At Stourton House, Yorks (now known as Stapleton Park, near Ferrybridge), the Lindley Library account states:

M^r Spyers' Expenses to & from Stourton House in
 Yorkshire from Oct the 31st. to Dec the 4 1782 — 8-15-0
 There in October 1782 myself _____
 Received by S Lapidge & Accounted for to
 the Executors _____ 69-10-0

Again, the wording and writing hand appear to be clear that the "myself" in question is Lapidge rather than Brown. It is also worth noting that Lapidge and Spyers generally have "expenses" rather than reclaim "disbursements". They are the home office team, although Spyers seems to spend an inordinate amount of time out on site surveying, but we will come to him later.

159-

Sir John Ramsden Bart for
Byram in Yorkshire —

£ 10

July
1782- A Survey of Byram by John
Speyer containing 373 Acres -
a fair & neat Drawing made of it with
proper References to the contents - at
one Shilling per Acre including 100 papers
Copies — 18-13-0

A General Plan for the Alteration
of the Place. sent to Byram in
Dec 1782 —

a Journey to Byram myself in 1782-

Received for and
Paid to the Executors by me
Samuel Speyer

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Fig. 2. The entry for Byram in the Lindley Library Account Book.

The other clue as to authorship is that, when Brown himself makes a visit, this is often described as for the visit to Sandlesford Priory, home of the “Queen of the Bluestockings”, Mrs Elizabeth Montagu:

M^r Spyers’ Expenses taking the Survey went July the
 23rd 1781 & returned August the 9 – 1781 ——— 3-5-0
 Mr Browns Journey there while M^r Spyers was there
 Mr Brown there in Dec^r. 1781 — S Lapidge with him

Lapidge refers to himself as “S Lapidge” whereas he refers to Mr Spyers and Mr Brown more formally. I am not sure that Brown would refer to himself in his own note in the third person. Whatever the truth of the matter, it is easy to see the close working relationship of the three men. They must have spent considerable time together travelling to and from sites, surveying, preparing general plans and other drawing office work.

Prior to John Spyers, another scion of an old nurseryman dynasty, who joined Brown in 1764 and became his main land and building surveyor and general draughtsman, Brown had had several earlier associates who fulfilled a similar role at different sites. One of the earliest of these is William Donn, who appears in Brown’s Drummonds account at the outset in 1753 and who went on to become a successful minor architect after leaving Brown’s employ in 1763. He is mentioned in the Lindley Library account for Croome Court, this most definitely in Brown’s hand:

For Journeys and Plans for five years, as also for
 admeasurements of the work in 1761 & in 1762
 some small matters by Donn ————— 200.0.0

The “admeasurement” of the work is a clerk of works or quantity surveyor role and is similar to the role that Brown himself had had earlier in his career at Stowe, where he was responsible for supervising and signing off tradesmen’s bills for the garden and building work there. This role seems to have been an essential stage in the training of an architect in Brown’s time and would then lead on to work as an executive architect for a more senior architect or gentleman architect, before becoming a fully recognised architect in his own right. Donn, like Spyers later, could also sketch and watercolour – useful skills in a busy landscape practice.

By comparison with the number of associates appearing in Brown’s

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Fig. 3. Engraving of Audley House in Essex, after a drawing by William Donn, from *The Seats of the Nobility and Gentry* (William Watts, 1779).

account with Drummonds Bank, very few of Brown's associates are mentioned in the Lindley Library account but when they are they are associated with specific sites and dates. This information is invaluable and certainly formed an important basis of Dorothy Stroud's seminal work on Brown, especially in respect of his associates (Stroud, 1950). Further information came to light through the work of Peter Willis who worked on Brown's bank account at Drummonds, which Stroud had not accessed (Willis, 1984: 382–391). These researches formed a solid basis for further work on Brown's financial activity. When I began my research on Nathaniel Richmond (c.1719–1784) in 1992, I learnt from Stroud that "a Mr Richmond was a scholar of Brown", but was not mentioned in the Lindley Library account. In Deborah Turnbull's account of Thomas White, another Brown associate not mentioned in the Lindley Library account, she referred to payments in the Drummonds account to a number of his associates, including White, Adam Mickle, James Sanderson and Richmond (Turnbull, unpublished). These associates all went on to have successful independent careers after working with Brown. Thomas White, for instance, was responsible for a similar number of parks to Brown himself and was able to purchase a freehold estate of some 800 acres around his new mansion house, Woodlands Hall, near Consett, County Durham. It is therefore essential to use the information contained in the Lindley Library account alongside other sources of information, especially the surviving eighteenth-century account ledgers at Drummonds Bank, Hoare's Bank and the dozen or so others whose records survive.

After Brown and Lapidge, the other associate who is mentioned most often in the Lindley Library account is John Spyers. As we have seen, Spyers was an accomplished draughtsman and surveyor. He is named at no less than eighteen sites as making extended site visits to carry out survey work, often including floor plans and elevations of the houses and ancillary buildings. Today, land-surveying and architectural survey work tend to be separate specialist disciplines, but this was clearly not the case in Brown's day. Spyers was at Cardiff Castle in May 1777:

1777 In May sent Mr Spyers to take General Plans of the Place & the
fronts & Plans of the different Storys of the Castle &c — }
A Journey there myself & returned June the 2nd 1777 — }

This in Brown's own hand, followed by payments to Henry Holland Junior, who had married Brown's daughter, Bridget, in February 1773.

The elder Henry Holland, also mentioned in the Lindley Library account, had first met Brown at Warwick Castle where both were working for Earl Brooke during 1749–1750. It may well have been this encounter with the Fulham-based “Bricklayer to the King” that encouraged Brown’s move to Hammersmith the following year. Brown had an outstanding ability to network effectively at all levels.

So, Brown’s practice by the late 1760s had a good clerk of works and surveyor in Samuel Lapidge, an excellent draughtsman and surveyor in John Spyers, and his architect son-in-law, Henry Holland Junior, available for architectural commissions. This core of West London-based staff formed the hub of the business. Beyond this was a network of tradesmen, usually heading larger teams of specialist trades or labour, who were site-based and in some cases clearly regional in activity. Some of these people had been with Brown since his days at Stowe in the 1740s.¹ For instance, Benjamin Read is mentioned in the Lindley Library account for work at Croome Court during 1762–1765 and went on to work on various sites for Brown as a gardener before settling, on Brown’s recommendation, at Blenheim Palace working for the Duke of Marlborough. The Stowe accounts show that Read worked with Brown at Stowe, as did another long-term associate, John Hobcraft. Hobcraft appears in the Stowe accounts as the head of a team of joiners working on the new buildings there, such as the Temple of Concord and Victory, originally referred to as the “Grecian Temple”. Hobcraft and his team often worked with Brown and Holland but also worked in their own right as at Audley End, where Hobcraft was responsible for the delightful Strawberry Hill Gothick Chapel built in 1768. A crucial element of Brown’s genius was his ability to attract associates of the first quality to implement his work. His high-end clients could rely on Brown and his business to produce the quality of output that his “brand” was known for.

John Payne, mentioned in the Lindley Library account for work at Broadlands, Hants, for Lord Palmerston alongside Henry Holland, John Hobcraft and John Deval, is clearly associated with Brown’s architectural projects and may be related to George (who worked at Stowe as a scaffolder), Edward, Joseph and Thomas Payne – all of whom appear in Brown’s Drummonds account. John Payne is shown as receiving £125 in 1756, and

¹ The Stowe Accounts are held in The Huntington Library, San Marino, California, and include receipted bills for building works which are often signed by Brown on Lord Cobham’s behalf.

then payments from 1764 to 1772, peaking at £675 in 1768. This suggests perhaps a family business as general builders. By contrast, John Deval is one of the leading master masons and stone carvers of Brown's time.

Henry Holland Junior's is the third signature to be found in the Lindley Library account. He appears as one of Brown's executors, for work at Richmond Gardens:

Account to His Majesty _____	2126.9.11
Rec ^d on Acc ^t _____	2031.17.6
	<u>£ 94.12.5</u>

Rec^d. March 9th 1787 of His Majesty by the hands of Gab. Mathias
 £94..12..5.. in Full for the balance of the annex'd acc^s. P^d all demands
 [signed: H^v Holland Ex^t]

Henry Holland Junior commenced work with Brown in 1768, working alongside his father who received payments from 1756 until 1782. Neither shows a continuous run of payments and both are best considered as sub-contractors, perhaps sub-consultants in the case of the younger. The way in which this worked can best be understood by reference to the Lindley Library account for Lord Gower at Trentham, Staffs:

1778	In March Received of the Earl (& Paid it M ^r Holland) }	500.0.0
	Rec ^d : of D ^o : and Paid to M ^r Holland at Trentham and in London _____	1000.0.0
1778	July the 27 th : Paid to M ^r Holland at Trentham } _____	700.0.0
	August the 11 th : Rec ^d : of his Lordsp	800.0.0
1779	Dec the 4 Rec ^d : of his Lordship & Paid it to M ^r Holland }	500.0.0
	Jan: the 29 th : Rec ^d : _____	1000.0.0
	April the 23 rd : Rec ^d : _____	500.0.0
	Nov ^{br} : Rec ^d : of his Lordship _____	800.0.0
	Paid to M ^r Holland	<u>£5800.0.0</u>
June 1780	Recd: of the Earl Gower on Acct: of the Building _____	600.0.0



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Fig 4. Engraving of Broadlands from *Jones' Views of the Seats, Mansions, Castles, etc. of Noblemen and Gentlemen in England* (1829).

Brown received, on the above account, a total of £5,700 but paid out a total of £5,800 to Henry Holland. There is clearly some payment missing here. For comparison, Brown paid Holland Jnr £6,610 in 1778 but very little in the following years according to the Drummonds Bank ledgers. It seems that he may have paid Holland “up front” for his services. His father was also receiving hundreds rather than thousands after 1778.

Among the other associates mentioned in the Lindley Library account are John Avery, Robert Bissell and Robert Lowe, who worked at Fulham from 1769–1776 for Sir Phillip Stephens. Richard Bagley, the Fulham nurseryman, also supplied plants there to the value of £13. 7s. 8d. The Drummonds Bank ledgers show that Bagley was supplying plants for Brown, probably elsewhere, as he received £28 in 1762, £31 in 1771 and £18 in 1773. There are several other nurseryman payments recorded in the Lindley Library account: to John Ash at Twickenham; Robert Lowe (Lapidge’s brother-in-law) at Hampton Wick; James Scott at Turnham Green; and John Williamson who had taken over Robert Furber’s nursery at Kensington Gore. The Drummonds ledgers add to this list with payments to William Burchell of Fulham, who took over Christopher Gray’s nursery in 1764 (1779); Richard Butt of Kew Green (1761); John Franklin of Lambeth Marsh (1771); Henry Hewitt of Brompton Park (1769); Hugh Ronalds of Brentford (intermittent 1769–1781); and James Shiells (1773). It has been suggested that Brown preferred to work with Williamson but the account evidence shows a wide range of plant and seed suppliers used by Brown. In fact, Williamson is best known working with Brown for the supply of plant material to Petworth and in the Lindley Library account for plants supplied to Chewton Place, Somerset, for the Earl of Waldegrave. On a more general theme, it is interesting to note that the first recorded delivery of ornamental, as opposed to forest or orchard, trees and shrubs was to Sir Roger Pratt’s Ryston Hall in Norfolk in 1672.¹ Less than one hundred years later there were literally hundreds of nurserymen and seedsmen: several dozen in London alone, and a scattering around almost all the major cities of Great Britain. The exponential growth of the nursery industry in the first half of the eighteenth century continued through Brown’s time and mirrors the

¹ Norfolk Record Office: Mf/Ro 219/1, quoted in Harvey (1974: 46). Harvey’s work is a useful reference for nurserymen as is Val Bott’s excellent website: nurserygardeners.com.

expansion of the wider landscape industry, of which Brown's practice was a small but highly prominent part.

Several other Brown associates are mentioned in the Lindley Library account. Cornelius Griffin is mentioned at Redgrave, Suffolk; Copt Hall in Essex; and Maiden Early in Berkshire. He received payments from Brown, recorded in the Drummonds ledgers, from 1758 to 1769. After that we know that he worked for the Duke of Northumberland at Alnwick Castle, where he died in 1773. He was replaced there by Thomas Biesley, another Brown associate mentioned for his work at Wimpole on Sanderson Miller's Castle:

July 1772 Rec^d the Balance of all Accts Excepting at the Tower & what has been done there by Biesley.

Biesley continued to work at Alnwick long after Brown's death. Peter Blair, who receives substantial payments from Brown in the Drummonds account from 1755 to 1779 is mentioned in the Lindley Library account as disbursing £600 on behalf of Brown at Luton Hoo, the seat of the Earl of Bute. Ominously, the Drummonds account also has a single small payment to an Anne Blair in 1779, suggesting that he may have died in that year. His disbursements at Luton are next to payments to Holland and he may well have been involved with the architectural side of Brown's work. The Lindley Library account shows £288. 7s. 1d. disbursed by James Hope at Rycot for the Earl of Abingdon in 1770–1771 and this correlates well with payments totalling £270 in the same years to James with a further £20 to a Thomas Hope shown in the Drummonds ledgers. On the other hand, William Horsburgh is mentioned in the Lindley Library account as receiving £20 in 1769 for work at Flambarbs, near Harrow, but the Drummonds ledgers show him receiving £216 from Brown in that year and a total of £2,529 from 1756 to 1769. It follows that no one source can be relied on and that the best we can hope to achieve in understanding Brown's business is to bring together what we know from various sources. The advent of online archives and documents has enabled this correlative work to be carried out much more easily. It also points up the remarkable work done before such easy access was available, by people like Dorothy Stroud, Eleanor Willson, Peter Willis and John Harvey. Brown's surviving account book held at the Lindley Library of the Royal Horticultural Society not only provides information not available elsewhere but also, read in conjunction with

other sources such as the Drummonds bank ledgers, casts light on one of our best known national figures and his world. In this 300th year since the birth of Lancelot Brown that is also something worth celebrating.

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Capable entrepreneur? Lancelot Brown and his finances¹

RODERICK FLOUD

Duck Bottom, 15 Flint Street, Haddenham, Bucks

Lancelot “Capability” Brown is the best-known landscape designer of all time, responsible for one of Britain’s major contributions to European culture. The tercentenary of his birth in 2016 has prompted a flood of reappraisals of his life, his clients, colleagues and employees, and the estates on which he worked. But he was also an entrepreneur, working within the context of a rapidly evolving economy in Britain in the early stages of the Industrial Revolution.

However, Brown’s business was very different from the mass-production textile and metal industries of the growing industrial towns. He came from a farming family and would probably have thought of himself as an agricultural improver. But, with the benefit of hindsight, he can be seen as a pioneer in what would now be called one of the creative industries, part of the service or tertiary sector which actually grew more rapidly in the eighteenth century, in terms of the numbers of people employed in it, than did manufacturing. Landscape design was a luxury trade which catered for the richest section of the population, as did other fashion industries such as architecture, furniture-making, interior decoration and china goods manufacture. They were influenced by European and Asian models made known to the British by expanding foreign trade.

The importance of the gardening and landscape design industries to the economy, then and now, has been neglected both by garden historians and by economic historians. The former have been mainly concerned with garden design and its evolution, while the latter have simply ignored what has been one of Britain’s important industries since the seventeenth century, a source of employment and an important aspect of consumer demand. This study is a small contribution to rectifying this neglect; it emphasises the scale of Brown’s enterprise as a landscape designer,

¹ Earlier versions of this paper were given as lectures at Gresham College, the Royal Over-Seas League and Wotton House. I am grateful to the audiences on those occasions for their questions and comments and to David Brown, Jane Brown and Cynthia Floud for their comments on drafts. I am of course responsible for any remaining errors.

the sources of demand for his products, and his methods of running his business and his finances.

Sources

This paper makes use, in particular, of two sets of Brown's financial records. The first (LL) is Brown's surviving account book, now owned by the Lindley Library of the Royal Horticultural Society, having been given to them in 2007 by Michael James Morrice FCA, MACIE, a descendant of Brown. The second (DB) is Brown's bank account with Drummonds Bank, now in the ownership of the Royal Bank of Scotland.¹ Both sets of records have long been known to biographers of Brown, at least since the magisterial work of Dorothy Stroud (1975) onwards, but they have recently been digitised to facilitate their use. The records have hitherto been used mainly to identify the sites where Brown worked and the men who worked with him, but they complement each other to provide an unusual record of the financial affairs of a very successful man.

LL is a list of Brown's clients, in approximate chronological order of their commissions to him between 1761 and his death in 1783, together with the payments made by them at the time of his original visits and designs, during the work and after (in some cases long after) their completion. There are some references to specific payments for surveys and designs and for travel expenses, but otherwise little or no detail is given about the nature of the work undertaken. Brown undertook a variety of work; in some cases, such as Claremont and Croome, he built a house as well as laying out the garden and park; in other cases his work was confined to the grounds and in yet others he supplied a design to be carried out by other contractors or the estate staff. In some cases, he visited a site but made no charge and presumably did no work.

DB is Brown's personal account with Drummonds Bank. It contains 161 double pages, which are chronological lists of payments into and out of the account covering not only his work but also his household expenses, his gifts to family members, his investments and even his purchases of lottery tickets. There is also a similar bank account, of seven double pages, recording the income and expenditure of his executors following his death.

¹ I am grateful to the Lindley Library and to the Archives Department of the Royal Bank of Scotland for their permission to use and quote from these two sources and to reproduce illustrations from them.

Lancelot Brown Esq.

1781

Date	Description	Dr	Cr	Balance
April 12	To Cash, p. Roy. Recd	104	35	5129 7 8
13	John Blair	109	60	
16	John Blair	126	20	
18	The Bishop	90	25	
19	James Spence	99	35	
	Land Tax	98	30	
21	James Langer	103	22	
	Cor. Dickinson	103	35	
22	James Spence	113	23	
23	Wm. Jones	119	25	
	at South	89	20	
	do	119	10	
25	Rich. Bellman	133	100	510
26	Roy. Recd	139	65	
	The Bishop	139	25	
	John Blair	139	25	
27	John Blair	145	20	
28	Land Tax	151	25	
29	John Blair	157	30	
30	James Spence	161	30	
	Cor. Dickinson	161	35	
	John Blair	161	20	
	Roy. Recd	161	75	
	at Blair	157	90	
May 1	Roy. Recd	157	20	520
3	John Blair	153	30	
5	James Spence	183	30	
9	John Blair	183	100	
10	Cor. Griffin	167	16 16	
	John Blair	172	11	
	do	172	20	
11	James Langer	172	50	
	Land Tax	178	30	
	Rich. Bellman	178	25	
12	John Blair	175	70	
	at Blair	183	10	
	James Spence	183	9 9	
13	James Spence	183	30	
14	John Blair	188	30	
	John Blair	188	10 6 6	472 11 6
16	John Blair	160	12	
17	at South	168	20	
	and Gardens	168	30	
	John Blair	168	25	
	Cor. Dickinson	168	30	
20	James Spence	173	30	
	James Spence	178	10	
21	James Spence	184	30	
22	John Blair	200	50	
23	John Blair	200	30	
	The Bishop	200	30	
25	James Spence	205	25	
	The Bishop	212	80	
26	Rich. Bellman	212	245	
	and Spence	212	55	
	at Blair	212	36	
27	do	217	30 5	323
28	John Blair	224	30	970 14 2
	Cor. Dickinson	224	35	
31	John Blair	295	25 10	
	Cor. Dickinson	295	18 8	
	James Spence	293	30	
2	John Blair	298	73 10	
	and Gardens	298	30	
	Cor. Griffin	298	30	
3	John Blair	293	50	
4	Roy. Recd	293	65	
5	John Blair	298	25	1016 13
	Cor. Griffin	298	5 5	2207 12 2

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Fig. 2. A page from Brown's account book with Drummonds Bank, showing payments from the account.

21

1768 . . . Contra . . . Cr

Date	Description	Debit	Credit	Balance
				9507 10 6
April 15	By Cash recd	23		
		122	675	
21	do	108	590	
	General B. 1000 & 10 ^{to} 5 April	109	60	
22	Recd	113	295	
26	Interest on bank books for 3 weeks	120	500	
May 3	Recd	132	530	
11	do	179	200	
12	of M. Robertson	184	500	
	of St. Donigall for his Rent			
	of £2250 (M. W. Brown's father)	184	3570 8	7020 8
	Account with him			
13	Recd	172	475	
26	do	210	410	
31	of James Robertson	199	6201 10	7636 10
June 1	Recd	302	700	8236 10 6
				700
				8936 10 6

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Fig. 3. A page from Brown's account book with Drummonds Bank, showing payments into the account.

The credits and debits were balanced by the bank once, or sometimes twice, during each year, but otherwise there was no attempt to determine his profit or loss; tantalisingly for garden historians, the list of debits gives simply the names of the men who worked for Brown, as surveyors, contractors or in other ways, without attributing any payment to any specific place or contract. However, in recent years David Brown (2001, 2016) has used DB to identify many of the contractors and suppliers and he uses this material in his paper in this volume (see p.3).¹

The meaning of money

The two sources, therefore, consist mainly of money payments. Brown's biographers have quoted, in particular, two sums of money: the £25 per annum which he was paid when he became Head Gardener at Stowe in 1741 and the £13,000 which he paid for the Manor of Fenstanton in 1767.² The contrast well illustrates his financial success, but leaves modern readers guessing about what such sums of money meant at the time and what the appropriate comparison is with money values today. In recent years, however, some biographers have sought to remove the guesswork. Lucy Brown (2011) equates £25 in 1741 to £2,129 today, while Steffie Shields (2016) opts for £3,625 as Brown's salary at Stowe and £1.5 million for Fenstanton; Sarah Rutherford (2016) has a more modest estimate of £1 million for his manor.

The effort is to be applauded, since otherwise sums in eighteenth-century money are essentially meaningless. But none of these answers are believable. £3,625 per annum, for example, equates to less than 10 hours work per week at the current minimum wage; it is simply not credible as the equivalent wage of the Head Gardener of probably the greatest garden in England. Meanwhile the price of Fenstanton, a manor of 1,000 acres, is translated to be little more than the cost of many London houses

¹ Brown had, for about six months, an account at Hoare's Bank, before transferring his money to Drummonds. David Brown has transcribed payments made to Brown from a number of clients of both Hoare's and Drummonds, some of which predate LL and are discussed below; I am most grateful to him for providing these data.

² See below, however, for a further discussion of the price that Brown paid for Fenstanton.

today.¹ The problem is that all these authors have chosen the wrong currency converters, using different versions of the Retail Price Index (RPI). The RPI is useful for assessing price changes over relatively short periods – perhaps up to one’s own lifetime; but it is based on the prices of a small range of goods and services which are very different today from those purchased in the eighteenth century. A better choice of converter reflects the fact that most of the payments recorded in LL and DB are for labour; it therefore uses changes in average earnings. To put it simply, if a payment is 75% of average earnings in 1750, then its equivalent is 75% of average earnings today.

The result is shown in Table 1. This also incorporates the fact that Brown received a housing allowance of £10 at Stowe, on top of his salary, and calculates that his equivalent income is equivalent to £65,470 today, reasonable for the position he held. It also shows that his later income, after he had left Stowe, was very large indeed.

It rapidly becomes confusing to quote both eighteenth-century and modern values, so in the remainder of this paper only the latter will be used.² This is an unusual procedure but it clarifies the scale of Brown’s business operations for a modern audience.

Income

Brown’s income, as Figure 4 shows, is reflected in both LL and DB; there are clear differences between the two sources, although the overall pattern is reassuringly similar.³ For unknown reasons, some income does not appear in LL; the most obvious example is a series of regular payments amounting

¹ John Phibbs, in a private communication, has suggested that the area of the manor may be misleading, in that it is not clear how much of the land of what was still an open-field village was actually owned by Brown as Lord of the Manor. However, he would still have received rents from the copyhold tenants and this would have been reflected in the price of the manor.

² The detailed conversions can be found at www.measuringworth.com, using the measures for labour earnings, value or cost.

³ Phibbs (2013: 245) suggests that LL is in fact Brown’s fifth account book and that it therefore does not contain earlier commissions, even when work was done after 1764, since those continued to be recorded in earlier books which are now lost. This view is supported by the fact that David Brown’s research into Hoare’s Bank accounts shows payments from a number of clients, commencing before 1761 but continuing after that date, which are not shown in LL.

Table 1. Converting 18th century money values into modern equivalents.

Source	Date & place	Sum	RPI equivalent	Average earnings equivalent
Brown 2011	1741 at Stowe	£25	£2,129	£46,760
Shields 2016	1741 at Stowe	£25	£3,625	£46,760
Floud 2016, ex Brown 2011	1741 at Stowe	£25 + £10 for housing		£65,470
Rutherford 2016	1767 Fenstanton Manor	£13,000	£1 million	£20.85 million
Shields 2016	1767 Fenstanton Manor	£13,000	£1.5 million	£20.85 million
Floud 2016	1755–1783 income (DB)	£487,000		£830.9 million
Floud 2016	1761–1783 income (LL)	£321,000		£508.7 million

to more than £25 million into DB between 20 October 1775 and Brown's death, attributed initially to "Honble. Mr Brudenell" – where the payments are specifically described as "on account of Richmond Gardens" – and from 27 November 1778 from Gabriel Mathias.

George Bridges Brudenell (c.1725–1801) was at the time Clerk of the Board of the Green Cloth, which controlled the finances of the royal household, and Gabriel Mathias was a painter who became Deputy Paymaster to the Board of Works, which carried out work in the royal palaces and gardens.¹ These large payments are thus probably for Brown's work on the Royal Gardens at Richmond (later incorporated into the Royal Botanical Gardens, Kew).² DB also confusingly includes as income the values of sales of Brown's previous investments, which were at times

¹ I am grateful to David Brown for this information about Gabriel Mathias.

² Payments from Brown's earlier clients, found by David Brown in the records of Hoare's Bank, consist of £3.9 million from the 3rd Earl of Aylesford at Packington, £85,000 from the 4th Duke of Beaufort at Badminton, £5.5 million from Earl Brooke at Warwick Castle (although this includes payments to Henry Holland Snr), £2.4 million from Sir James Dashwood Bt at Kirtlington, £4.6 million from the 8th Earl of Northumberland at Alnwick, £1.7 million from the 3rd Viscount Weymouth at Longleat and £1.8 million from the 4th Earl of Plymouth at Hewell Grange. These have not been incorporated into Figure 4.

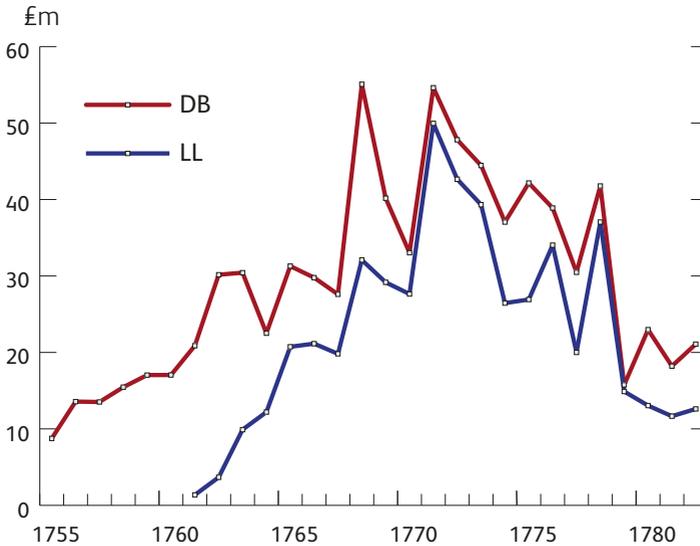


Fig. 4. Brown's income (in £ million) 1755–1782 from LL (blue) and DB (red).

substantial. LL includes a number of payments for surveys and expenses, which are absent or difficult to identify in DB. As a whole, however, DB appears to be a more comprehensive source than LL for Brown's income and expenditure and it can be used – as is done later in this paper – to calculate his profits.¹

Clients

LL is an unrivalled source of information, however, about Brown's clients, more than 150 of them. It has been used in this respect by a large number of authors, perhaps most fully by Turner (1985) and recently by Phibbs

¹ However, Phibbs (2013: 245) states that "Brown's Drummonds accounts cannot be taken as a complete record either – it is clear that a good deal of money came directly to Brown and was not banked." If the payments are reasonably complete, but the income missing, then the calculation below will understate Brown's profits; however, it is also possible that Brown made payments in cash from the cash that he received.

(2013, 2014), to identify the places where Brown worked. But LL also makes it possible to discover many details about almost all of Brown's clients, their place in society and the sources of the income and wealth that were used to pay him and to create his gardens.¹ His was a client list probably rivalled only by those of his great predecessors at the start of the eighteenth century, George London and Henry Wise; LL includes the King, seven dukes, 26 earls, 20 other peers, 19 knights and baronets, two generals and a judge. Most of his clients came from a very small segment of British society, what would now be called the "super-rich", although of course all his clients had to be wealthy enough to pay Brown's fees.

In 1759, Joseph Massie, an antiquarian and collector, compiled what he called a "social table" of England and Wales, listing the different classes or ranks of society with their average incomes.² At the top, apart from the King, were the titled families, peers, baronets and knights; there were about 1270 families in this group, comprising about 0.08% of all families and within them, at the very top, were 10 families with average incomes of about £50 million. They were billionaires. But even the next groups in the table, 16,800 families of esquires and gentlemen, had average incomes of over £750,000.³

Brown's clients came from the very top of the social table. Apart from the King, the highest spender was Lord Clive – Clive of India – whose new house and garden, Claremont in Surrey, cost £51.8 million. Next came £35.3 million paid by the Duke of Marlborough for the massive works to create, at Blenheim, Brown's largest lake. Third was Lord Palmerston, father of a later Prime Minister, who spent £34.6 million for work at Broadlands in Hampshire, while fourth was the Earl of Bute – tutor to

¹ Almost all his clients can be identified in the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, History of Parliament online, Parks and Gardens UK or Wikipedia.

² This can be found most conveniently in Lindert & Williamson (1982).

³ This was an extremely unequal society. It is not possible to use the Massie social table to calculate an index of inequality, the Gini coefficient (where a higher number denotes greater inequality), but similar social tables for 1688 and 1801–1803 produce Gini coefficients of 45 and 51, showing rising inequality over the period (Milanović, Lindert & Williamson, 2007). These values are still less than those of two very unequal societies today, Brazil at 53 and South Africa at 63, but much higher than the current UK value of 32 (ONS 2015) or even the US value of 41. (Wikipedia: "List of countries by income equality" reporting data from the World Bank.)

George III, when he was Prince of Wales, and later his Prime Minister – who spent £31.8 million at Luton Hoo, at his London house and at his retirement home, High Cliff on the Isle of Wight.

The work of Turner (1985), in identifying sites at which Brown worked, makes it possible to separate the sites listed in LL where he built houses from those where he worked only on the grounds. The average cost of the 53 sites where he did not build the house was £5.1 million, while the 14 commissions including a house had an average value of £13.9 million. Wilson & Mackley (2000: 365) concluded on the basis of their own work and that of other authors that landscaping works in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries on new sites cost about one third of the total cost of house and gardens. The Brown figure seems to have been very close to this, at 37%.¹ It is, however, important to remember that, whereas a house might typically be rebuilt once every two or three centuries, major landscaping works were often carried out by successive generations of landowners, so that the total cost of garden works mounted up very considerably over the decades.

All this expenditure by Brown's clients may seem unfeasibly high. Would anyone spend £35 million on a garden? However, some contemporary examples suggest that these costs are, if anything, underestimated as modern equivalents. The Duchess of Northumberland is reputed to have spent £50 million recently on renovating the Alnwick gardens. Another modern analogue for the Brownian gardens, with their large lakes, is the landscaping works carried out by the holiday company, Center Parcs; construction of the lake and streams (but not the swimming pool complex) at their most recent holiday village in Britain, Woburn Forest, cost £50 million, although the lake is small by comparison with those built by Brown at Wotton, Blenheim or many other sites.²

Where did the money come from? It is possible, using the LL list, to describe in general terms the sources of the income and wealth of Brown's clients. Most important, of course, was land; Brown's work needed large landscapes, but most of his clients had thousands of acres more on their

¹ However, a very wide range of payments underlies both averages, with the costs including houses ranging from £328,000 to £51.8 million and without houses from £164,000 to £35.3 million, so the averages should be treated with some caution.

² I am grateful to Center Parcs for this information.

estate, beyond the new landscape, or in other parts of the country. This land was becoming increasingly valuable – the price of land rose twice as fast as other prices during the eighteenth century – and many of his clients, such as the Duke of Bridgewater, the Earl of Bute, the Earl of Ashburnham and the Lowther family, were also exploiting coal and iron deposits.

But there were three other important sources of income. Marriage was crucial; many noble families intermarried, consolidating their estates and wealth, while others rescued or bolstered the family fortunes by strategic marriages to the daughters of rich merchants and a few brewers and lawyers. The second source was slavery in the West Indies, which provided the funds for Harewood, and the third, speculation in the East Indies; Clive was only one of several “nabobs” who employed Brown.

Last, but not least, was what the radical John Wilkes called “the Old Corruption”, the network of court and government positions obtained by patronage. These were, by modern standards, unimaginably well-paid; Brown’s friend, the Earl of Coventry, of Croome, was for 18 years a Gentleman of the Bedchamber. For one week in eight, he assisted the King at his dressing, waited on him when he ate in private, guarded access to his bedchamber and closet and provided noble companionship for him. Coventry’s salary for six weeks of probably pleasant work was £1.6 million per annum, 40 times the average male wage for a year. It brought him a total of about £30 million.

The payments for court and government positions came from the Civil List, which paid the expenses of government and the royal court; it was a part of what is now called public expenditure. The money for it – together with the larger military expenditures – came from the proceeds of customs and excise duties, land and other taxes and government borrowing, the last of which rose enormously during the eighteenth century.¹ The burden of servicing the large debt, together with the other expenses of government, fell more and more on indirect taxes on consumption, incurred by the bulk of the population, rather than on direct taxes such as the land tax levied on landowners. Income tax was not introduced, temporarily, until the Napoleonic Wars.

It is not possible, of course, to say that a particular £1 from any one of these sources paid for a bit of a Brownian garden. But they underpinned

¹ The public debt of the United Kingdom was £29.2 billion in 1700 and £484.7 billion in 1799.

a lifestyle for the monarchy and the super-rich which made possible the building of the gardens and landscapes which we still admire today and which provided the income which enriched Lancelot Brown himself. How did he exploit the opportunity which the wealth and the taste of the super-rich created?

Business

Brown had to overcome many difficulties in building up and running his business. His clients were scattered across England and Wales – he seems to have declined commissions from Ireland and Scotland – at a time when the road and postal systems were still poor and there was even danger from highwaymen. Although river and canal systems were better developed, the carriage of goods such as plants and trees was still slow and cumbersome. Brown had to establish a network of men, upon whom he could rely, to carry out his commissions and then needed to control the cost and quality of their work so as to satisfy exacting customers. All this was a task greater even than that of most other eighteenth-century entrepreneurs, who operated within a restricted geographical area even when – as was the case in the textile industry before the coming of the factory – they relied on large numbers of “outworkers”, spinning or weaving in their own homes.

Two specific financial difficulties must have exacerbated these problems. The first was that his commissions were “lumpy”; that is, he could not rely on a constant flow of income – such as might come, for example, from selling textiles or metal manufactures. LL shows that Brown typically had five or fewer commissions at any one time and, although he seems to have been remarkably successful in extracting stage payments from his clients when the work was in progress, this produced a very irregular pattern of credits into his accounts. Meanwhile he was faced, as the DB debits show, with the need to make up to 10 or 15 payments each week – admittedly of much smaller sums – to the people doing the work. In modern parlance, managing his cash flow must have been a nightmare.

All this was made worse by the primitive nature of his accounting systems. In this he was typical of eighteenth-century entrepreneurs in an age before cost or management accounting had been developed. Brown used, as DB shows, the so-called “master and steward” system which had been developed for, and was still used by, the great landed estates. In this method, all forms of income were listed together, as were

all forms of expenditure; the two columns of figures were totalled once, or sometimes twice, a year and a balance “struck”. This system means that it is impossible to attribute any one expenditure to any one project or source of income; a profit or loss cannot be calculated for a particular job, and this must have made it very difficult for Brown to estimate the cost of the next commission. We know that he did make estimates, even if some of his clients were essentially willing to pay whatever he asked for. But the LL document, for example, has no information about what he spent for a particular client.

Strategies

How did Brown cope with these problems? Four strategies seem to have been particularly important: sub-contracting, high profits, maintaining liquidity and an underpinning from public expenditure. None of these, with the possible exception of the last – his position as royal gardener – was unique to Brown, but he certainly seems to have been successful in utilising them.

Brown’s projects were dominated by earth-moving and water-engineering, as were other large projects of the period such as river improvement, drainage of the Fens, canal-building and road construction. He used the same methods. Sub-contracting was ubiquitous in building and civil engineering in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Britain. Essentially, any job was split up into “bite-sized” pieces. Christopher Wren used the system to rebuild St Paul’s, the bridges of London were contracted out pier by pier, the canals were constructed short section by short section; in each case, a sub-contractor – with the skills to carry out the specific task – would undertake it either for a fixed sum or on a cost-plus basis, charging for materials and labour and adding on a profit (Ferguson & Chrimes, 2012: ch. 2).

The advantage of sub-contracting was that it spread the risk. If one contractor proved unsatisfactory, or couldn’t manage his workforce, or got his finances wrong and went bankrupt, he could easily be replaced without jeopardising the whole project. Risk could also be mitigated, of course, by choosing reliable sub-contractors; David Brown (2001, 2016 and this volume) shows how Brown built up long-term relationships with “the Capability Men” and often recommended them to employers looking for contractors for later jobs or as head gardeners. The system did require great attention to quality control, which may account for the incessant travelling

to different sites for which Brown was famous; it was also necessary for someone – we do not know who – to check the bills which came in from the sub-contractors and to certify them for payment. But again, if something went wrong, it could easily be rectified. In some cases, Brown even used his clients as sub-contractors, providing in contracts that materials such as stone, gravel and bricks would be supplied from the estates.

However, the sub-contracting system requires that the contractor has the cash with which to pay the sub-contractor. Two more strategies were designed to achieve this: making substantial profits and keeping them in the form of liquid assets. Entrepreneurial profits in the eighteenth century were high by modern standards, the result of a relative scarcity of producers in many areas and, also, a reasonable reward for the high risks involved; manufacturers and other businessmen and financiers did not receive the protection of limited liability laws until the middle of the nineteenth century. Financial failure could, and did, lead to bankruptcy and the debtors' prison. Brown was personally liable for all his debts. However, he was also in a good position, as compared with other businessmen, because of the very high demand for his services, and he was – despite the difficulties of his accounting methods – well placed to make profits.

Did he do so? The nature of Brown's accounts in DB makes this tedious to answer but it can be done. In order to estimate the profits on his business one needs to strip out from the accounts all the payments for household expenses,¹ all the payments to family members and all the purchases, sales and dividends relating to his investments and land acquisitions. Finally, in order to compare him with other businessmen, one needs to give him an imputed salary. The result of doing all this is shown in Figure 5. It is an estimate that Brown made a profit, during the years covered by DB, of about £139 million from total receipts of about £840 million, a profit rate of about 17%.

While Brown's profits were substantial, they were also very variable, with pronounced peaks in 1768, 1774 and 1780 and troughs in 1771 and 1779. This was, if not a dangerous position to be in, at least one that required careful management. It required him to keep liquid assets, built up in the good times, to ensure that he had sufficient funds to meet his obligations in the bad times.

¹ It is, however, very difficult to tell whether some payments are for household expenses rather than to his workmen and sub-contractors.

Managing money

This was not as easy as it would be today. There were far fewer safe havens for money in the eighteenth century than now. Banks, such as Drummonds itself, were entirely private and funds deposited in them were not protected from default or fraud on the part of the banker; many private banks around the country failed, for example if a rumour spread that the banker was in trouble and depositors rushed to withdraw their funds. So it was unwise to keep large deposits in a bank. Some nabobs such as Lord Clive were reputed to keep their ill-gotten gains in diamonds, but this was unusual. There was no opportunity for safe and liquid investment in most commerce or industry, since such enterprises could not issue tradable shares; partnerships in them were risky and inflexible.

There were, in fact, only two types of investment which offered both safety and some flexibility, together with at least some dividends and the possibility of capital growth; Brown used both of them. They were investment in land and in government stock, known as “consols” or “the funds”.

Brown’s purchase of Fenstanton Manor, with its 1,000 acres, from the Earl of Northampton in the autumn of 1767 is usually interpreted as the pursuit of social status. £20.9 million seems a lot to spend for that purpose and indeed, although Brown did serve for a time as High Sheriff of Huntingdonshire, he never lived at Fenstanton, although his eldest son was more active in the area in pursuit of a seat in Parliament. Brown had, probably, sufficient social status already, bestowed by his client list and rich friends. It is much more likely that he bought land as a good investment, at a time of rising land prices.

As Jane Brown (2011: 198) shows, £20.9 million was not the whole amount which Brown paid for Fenstanton. He also wrote off a debt of £2.5 million which the Earl of Northampton owed for work at Castle Ashby. Northampton was in financial difficulties and was declared bankrupt soon afterwards. So the total paid was £23.4 million; was this a reasonable price?

Turner, Beckett and Afton (1997: appendix 1, pp.259–302) record the rent levels of numerous great estates; those for Northamptonshire, Norfolk and Nottinghamshire¹ show that the average annual rent per acre in 1780

¹ Unfortunately, Turner, Beckett and Afton do not cite any rents from Lincolnshire, Huntingdonshire and Cambridgeshire for the relevant period.

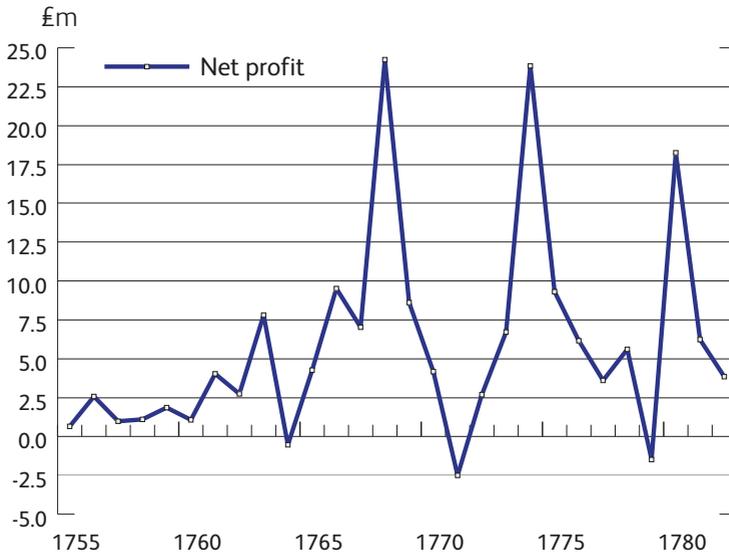


Fig. 5. Brown's profits net of capital transactions and payments to himself and his family.

was £963.¹ It was normal for the price of land to be “20 years’ purchase”, that is 20 times the annual rent, to reflect the fact that interest rates were about 5% at the time. This implies that the likely cost of the 1,000 acres at Fenstanton would have been £22.2 million. However, there was a wide range around the average rental values for the region and it would not be sensible to conclude that Brown's £23.4 million was more than the normal market price.

A puzzle that remains is the reason for a payment of £20.1 million that Brown made to the Earl of Egmont on 1 June 1768, exactly one year after he made the smaller of the two payments for Fenstanton. This is the largest single payment made in DB. Egmont's second wife, Catherine Compton, was the sister of the Earl of Northampton. Since there is no reference in DB to a payment of £20.9 million to the Earl of Northampton, one possibility is that this payment of £20.1 million to Egmont was in fact the second and larger part of the payment for Fenstanton, made for some

¹ £0.65 in the prices of 1780.

reason to the Earl's sister. If this is so, the total payment for Fenstanton would have been £21.4 million, closer to the value of £22.2 million derived from the acreage of the estate. Jane Brown (2011: 195) states that Henry Drummond, a member of the banking family who had recently married another sister of the Earl of Northampton, Elizabeth Compton, was "clearly trying to help the Earl's known financial difficulties by selling outlying properties", so it is possible that this was such a transaction and intended to keep the money out of the Earl's accounts.¹ More research is needed into this episode.²

Land was certainly a safe investment and carried with it an income from rents; Brown could expect to receive about £1 million annually. However, land had the disadvantage of being rather illiquid; it took time to sell if money was needed, although it could be used as security for a loan. Much more liquid and also secure was investment in government stock.³ Brown used this to the full, buying large amounts of stock bearing either 4% or 5% interest, his peak holding being of £13.8 million in 1774. He also invested heavily, for a short period, in the more risky bonds of the East India Company, but avoided involvement in the stock crash of the early 1770s, which ruined many investors.

The fourth defensive strategy employed by Brown, on top of sub-contracting, high profits and liquid investments, was to obtain a regular

¹ It has also been suggested that, as the Earl of Egmont was First Lord of the Admiralty between 1763 and 1766, the payment was in some way related to John Brown's naval career or Lancelot Brown's political career, although £20.1 million would be far more than would have been required to secure Egmont's interest with the Admiralty on behalf of John or even a parliamentary seat.

² Brown's will and the codicil to it are largely concerned with the arrangements for his estates. His second son John was left, in trust, the estate in Lincolnshire (together with £1.4 million "on account of the estate left to him in Lincolnshire being less in value than it was when I made my will") and the estates in Huntingdonshire and Cambridgeshire were left, also in trust, to his eldest son, Lancelot Jnr. The will then makes elaborate provision for passing the estates to other family members should the first legatees die.

³ This could not have been said in the seventeenth century, when lending to government was extremely risky. But the management of the government (the "national") debt by the Bank of England after 1688 had by Brown's time, despite wobbles during the Stuart rebellions of 1715 and 1745, given confidence in consols, the "consolidated" debt, as an investment vehicle.

source of income in the shape of his appointment as one of the royal gardeners. Total expenditure on the royal gardens, most of which were not open to the public, was about £11 million per annum in Brown's time.¹ Part of this was the payment for Brown's contract as a royal gardener.² He and his friends lobbied assiduously for the post and it is not difficult to see why. By the time of his death, LL shows, Brown had been paid £54 million for his work maintaining the grounds of Hampton Court; he also received an official residence, Wilderness House, in the grounds of the palace and lived there for the rest of his life, using it as the headquarters of his business. The payments from Brudenell and Mathias – shown in DB but not in LL – for landscaping at Richmond and Kew added a further £25 million. This was not, of course, all profit, since Brown had to keep Hampton Court in good order and pay for the work at Richmond; however, later in the century, one of Brown's successors in the post complained bitterly that the Treasury had offered him a new contract for garden maintenance which would largely remove his previous profit of 33%. This confirms the view that profits in the eighteenth century were routinely high. If Brown made similar profits, it is not difficult to see how valuable his royal connection was.

Gifts and legacies

Brown's biographers, from Stroud (1975) onwards, have quoted Brown's will as evidence of his wealth, sometimes inferring from it that he did not make much money. The problem is that, as Rubinstein (2006) has demonstrated, wills are poor evidence of wealth or lifetime earnings. There

¹ Calculated from returns of expenditure listed, for the relevant period, in the Office of Works: Accounts, Paymaster's Annual Accounts. Document WORK 5/141 in the National Archives.

² Although Brown is often referred to as "the" royal gardener, he was actually only one of five. Document WORK 142, the Paymaster's Accounts, in the National Archives, shows that in 1767 Thomas Robinson received £2.9 million for St James's and Kensington, with an additional £1.2m for the Queen's Garden; John Haverfield at Richmond received £2.4 million; Brown got £2.1 million for Hampton Court (although LL shows him getting £3.2 million) and John Kent £165,000 for Newmarket. From 1774 Adam Younger is also shown as getting £127,000 for Windsor. By Brown's time, Hampton Court was no longer used as a royal residence, George III and his family preferring Kensington and Richmond., but produce from its kitchen garden helped to feed the royal household.

are two major difficulties: first, wills do not normally refer to gifts made before death; second, wills are good evidence for specific bequests but give no indication of the value of the residue or of the landed property.¹

Nevertheless, some indication of Brown's assets in 1783 can be seen in the annuity which the will provided for his wife, Biddy, of £579,000. At contemporary interest rates, this would have required provision of a capital sum of £11 million, although in practice such annuities were usually secured against income from land; this, as Brown's will records at inordinate length, was the case here.² But the value of his assets should also emerge from the accounts of his executors, responsible for winding up his business and carrying out the instructions set out in his will.

However, study of the executors' accounts shows that, although they certainly made large payments to Brown's legatees, they did not actually carry out his instructions to the full; there was not enough money left in the account for them to do so.³ There were two reasons for this. The immediate reason was that a superior charge on the estate was a loan of £3.8 million taken out in 1777 by Brown and Henry Holland and repaid by the executors in 1783.

The longer-term reason was, however, that particularly during the 1770s and early 1780s Brown transferred large sums of money from his profits to his family, essentially anticipating their legacies. Thus his wife received £9.1

¹ Brown's will in the records of the Prerogative Court of Canterbury does not give an overall value for Brown's estate. Even if it did, it is important to note that, during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (strictly, until 1898) probate values did not include the value of land; this depresses the apparent wealth of many testators.

² Two further annuities, of £29,000 each, to Brown's sister and sister-in-law, were secured in the same way. If, as argued above, the Fenstanton Estate would have supplied an annual rental income of about £1 million, there was ample security there for the three annuities.

³ Nevertheless, Mrs Bridget (Biddy) Brown received £1.2 million, Lancelot Jnr. £2.2 million and John £2.4 million. The largest payments by the executors were of £4.3 million to Brown's son-in law and business partner Henry Holland Jnr.; it is probable that these were part of the process of winding up the business but also included the bequest of £2.2 million to his daughter Margaret which is referred to in the codicil to Brown's will. Lancelot Brown was the residuary legatee but the value of the residue is unknown; it presumably formed some part of the £2.2 million received by him.

million between 1771 and 1782, Lancelot Junior received £8.1 million and the second son John £5.0 million; Brown also made a single payment of £6.3 million in 1775 to Richard Brown, who was named in Brown's will as his nephew, son of his brother John. He also paid Henry Holland Jnr £7 million in 1773, apparently the dowry for Brown's daughter, Bridget.¹ Finally, he withdrew £21.4 million himself over that period for unspecified purposes. There may have been other smaller payments to family members, so the total withdrawn was probably more than £57 million.

It is possible, indeed, that Brown transferred too much to his family for the good of the business. This may be why he and Henry Holland borrowed two large sums from Drummonds Bank. As well as the loan of £3.8 million taken out by Brown and Henry Holland on 11 July 1777, which was still outstanding when Brown died, there was an even larger loan, of £4.3 million, taken out by Brown himself on 2 March 1778, although that was repaid on 24 July 1780, three years before his death. The fact that he needed these loans, on which he had to pay a relatively high rate of interest, suggests that the business was short of working capital. Brown's health was, by the late 1770s, concerning himself and his family and friends, and the number of commissions he received was certainly diminishing.

Conclusion

Despite the financial transactions of the years before his death, Lancelot Brown was immensely successful. Although he built his career in the early years of the Industrial Revolution, he achieved a high reputation and great wealth in a "creative industry" far from the smoke and grime of the growing manufacturing towns.² Brown saw an opportunity and exploited it, which is perhaps the best definition of the work of a successful entrepreneur. The habit of big spending on houses, gardens and parks had been acquired by the British monarchy and aristocracy in the seventeenth century; it was

¹ There are a number of references, also, to payments to T. Browne or Thomas Brown, but some of these may have been to contractors rather than to Brown's third son, Thomas, who became a clergyman, and they have therefore not been included.

² It is notable that none of his clients had made their money from manufacturing, although some had exploited the mineral resources under their estates and others had acquired funds from marriage into "trade". Robert Drummond, his banker, for whom Brown worked at Cadland, came closest to the new money of the eighteenth century. But almost all of Brown's clients were "old money".

fuelled by the growing prosperity of the country in the early eighteenth century and by the growth of forms of public expenditure on the royal gardens and on court appointments for aristocrats. This essentially transferred funds from the bulk of the population into the landscapes of London, Wise, Bridgeman, Kent, Brown and others. In the process, they helped to create a thriving industry in the form of nurseries, tree plantations and collectors who scoured the world – initially North America – from the early eighteenth century onwards to meet the demands of novelty and fashion. It is time for Brown to be celebrated not just as a brilliant landscape designer but as one of the eighteenth century's most successful businessmen.

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The afterlife of Capability Brown

BRENT ELLIOTT

c/o The RHS Lindley Library, The Royal Horticultural Society, London

The hero of this Occasional Paper was born three hundred years ago, and today his status as a major figure in the history of gardening seems secure. But there are many matters connected with him about which there is as yet no consensus: among them, how he should be referred to. Lancelot Brown? Capability Brown? “Capability” Brown? Dorothy Stroud, exercising the biographer’s prerogative of referring to her subject by his first name, opted for Capability as a sufficient forename (“Capability’s handiwork was mistaken for Nature”), but who else has had the temerity to follow her example? Having once been censured by Richard Gorer for enclosing his sobriquet in inverted commas (Gorer 1987: 76), I will call him Capability Brown in this article, but my fellow authors have each chosen different strategies. Let a hundred flowers bloom.

An embattled reputation

Brown had no lack of opponents and critics during his lifetime; to name Sir William Chambers should be sufficient. Once he was dead, the opponents multiplied, the grounds of complaint ranging from the stylistic to the social and financial. As it was stylistic complaints that were important in the long term, let us acknowledge the other grounds by quoting the following passage from Book 3 (“The garden”) of William Cowper’s poem *The Task* (1785):

Improvement too, the idol of the age,
Is fed with many a victim. Lo, he comes!
The omnipotent magician, Brown, appears!
Down falls the venerable pile, the abode
Of our forefathers – a grave whisker’d race,
But tasteless. Springs a palace in its stead,
But in a distant spot; where more exposed
It may enjoy the advantage of the north,
And aguish east, till time shall have transform’d
Those naked acres to a sheltering grove.
He speaks. The lake in front becomes a lawn:

Woods vanish, hills subside, and valleys rise;
And streams, as if created for his use,
Pursue the track of his directing wand,
Sinuous or straight, now rapid and now slow,
Now murmuring soft, now roaring in cascades –
E'en as he bids! The enraptured owner smiles.
'Tis finish'd, and yet, finish'd as it seems,
Still wants a grace, the loveliest it could show,
A mine to satisfy the enormous cost.
Drain'd to the last poor item of his wealth,
He sighs, departs, and leaves the accomplish'd plan,
That he has touch'd, retouch'd, many a long day
Labour'd, and many a night pursued in dreams,
Just when it meets his hopes, and proves the heaven
He wanted, for a wealthier to enjoy!

There certainly were cases of a Brown landscape being sold within a few years of completion, as in the cases of Ancaster House and Valons, the latter of which Brown ended by treating as a bad debt. Note also that by the time this was published Brown had been dead for two years, and was no doubt busy removing the topiary from heaven.

Stylistic reaction against Brown took two primary forms: the Picturesque debate, which thundered noisily for some decades, beginning in the 1780s, and the return to formality, which had a greater long-term effect. William Gilpin, whose topographical studies launched the enthusiasm for the picturesque, admired Brown, and sought the picturesque not in gardens but in the wilder countryside; but Sir Uvedale Price and Richard Payne Knight quickly applied Gilpin's principles to garden design, and condemned Brown's work for monotony, for lack of visual stimulation, for attempted pristine qualities instead of the more natural ones of ruggedness and wildness. Knight, in his poem *The Landscape*, published two engravings, showing the same scene as treated by Brown and as a picturesque enthusiast would prefer it (rugged, full of bushes).

Hence, hence! thou haggard fiend, however call'd,
Thin, meagre genius of the bare and bald;
Thy spade and mattock here at length lay down,
And follow to the tomb thy fav'rite Brown:

Thy fav'rite Brown, whose innovating hand
 First dealt thy curses o'er this fertile land;
 First taught the walk in formal spires to move,
 And from their haunt the secret Dryads drove;
 With clumps bespotted o'er the mountain's side,
 And bade the stream 'twixt banks close shaven glide.
 (Knight, 1794: 17)

The polemics of Price and Knight prompted a response from George Mason, who in the original edition of his *Essay on Design in Gardening* had been critical of Brown (“an egregious mannerist”), but who now saw him as unfairly attacked:

Why BROWN should be charged with all the defects of those, that have called themselves his followers, I have seen no good reason alledged, nor can I suppose it possible to produce one. Would any critic think of blaming Virgil for the turgid pomp of Statius, or the conceits of Claudian? (Mason, 1795: 131)

And in response to the picturesque theorists, Mason produced a rhetorical question that I think has been badly neglected in considerations of the aesthetics of the landscape movement generally:

I will only ask, whether Nature is a more pleasing object in a dwindled and shrivelled condition, than when her vigour “is as great, her beauty as fresh, and her looks as charming, as if she newly came out of the forming hands of her Creator?” (ibid.: 204)

(The quotation is from Shaftesbury’s *Moralists*.) The idea that an Edenic inspiration lay behind Brown’s landscapes seems to me worth more attention than it has been given.

The return to formality began with a nostalgia for the old formal gardens that Brown had destroyed; Price had followed the fashion in removing the terraces at his garden at Foxley in his youth, and bitterly regretted it later. As an active feature in new design, it was initially associated with Humphry Repton, who had begun his career in 1783 as Brown’s self-declared successor, but who by 1800 was reintroducing into garden design some of the formal features that Brown had taken such

trouble to destroy: avenues, walls, architectural terraces, flower gardens in the main views from the windows. But even Brown's former partner and son-in-law Henry Holland, by 1800, was producing schemes that retained old avenues and included geometric flower gardens (Jacques, 1983: 140–141). Repton would eventually trumpet, in his plans for the Brighton Pavilion, the motto that “Gardens are works of art, rather than of nature”, and this became the defining call for the next generation. By the late 1830s, it was a standard attitude that the “English landscape garden” had nothing natural about it, but was just as “wholly a style of conventional artifice” as any of the formal styles that had preceded it (M'Intosh, 1838: 23). The great response to Brown's style in the 1840s and 1850s was, as in the work of Charles Barry at Trentham and at Harewood, to frame the house with architectural terraces that separated it from the Brownian landscape. By the 1850s even the ha-ha was losing its function as a hidden abettor of the landscape effect, and becoming an object to be drawn attention to, a decorative feature; Robert Fish complained of one instance, “I cannot see the propriety of the prevalent fashion of making a concealed fence, and then sticking a walk on the top of it, that you may have the pleasure of looking into a ditch that you profess a desire to conceal” (Fish, 1858: 4).

John Lindley: a rearguard defence

But in the middle of the nineteenth century, one perhaps surprising voice was raised in defence of Brown: that of John Lindley, the Assistant Secretary of the Horticultural Society and editor of the *Gardeners' Chronicle*. During the course of the years 1847–1848, Lindley wrote a series of leaders in his weekly magazine on the theme of landscape gardening and its rules, in the course of which he defended the landscape style generally and Brown to some degree in particular.

Lindley had an axe to grind: the fashion for historical revivalism, which he found tolerable when it amounted to details in what was otherwise a grand landscape, but whose consequences he feared now that architects were turning their attention to the Tudor period. Some of the material Lindley used in his leaders he collected in 1848 into a lecture which he delivered to the Horticultural Society, on the gardens of the Elizabethan age (Lindley, 1848), which he denounced as displaying “a most Lilliputian grasp of mind and imagination”, primarily because those gardens had been enclosed: “no wide expanse of surface; no undulation... no changing

views created artificially yet natural in effect". He challenged the idea that the garden ought to suit the architectural style of the house; instead it ought to respond to the qualities of the wider landscape. And to attack the Jacobean revivalists required the defence of their hate figure, Brown: "These rule-and-line men decried BROWN as an ignorant revolutionist because he would return to Nature, and they still strove to maintain their doctrine that straight lines and right angles, and obtuse angles and acute angles, were the chief among the component beauties of LANDSCAPE GARDENING" (Lindley, 1847: 188 [leader, 20 March 1847]). Having thus trounced his enemies, Lindley advanced a couple of weeks later to his main defence of Brown:

BROWN is beyond all question the true champion of NATURE as the presiding power in his science.

In what, then, did his chief merit consist? A merit without which no professor can form a landscape. It was not only the genius which, unfettered, would indulge chiefly in the beauties of NATURE – it was not only the taste which would arrange these beauties in fair and graceful proportion *at the time*: but it was the possession of a far higher quality – a quality without the operation of which present arrangements, however beautiful, may end in final deformity: we mean "A TRUE IMAGINING OF FUTURE EFFECTS IN EVERY PART OF THE DESIGN." (Lindley, 1847: 219 [leader of 3 April 1847]).

Lindley did not claim that Brown was free of faults; in particular he decried his systematic removal of avenues. But he defended his placing of bodies of water not in the lowest part of the grounds, as being consistent with the phenomena of the natural world (while acknowledging that this became a mannerism which Repton had to correct sometimes).

But no person of even ordinary taste could condemn BROWN for imitating Nature in her own chief characteristic; or for replacing oblong, or square, or angular pieces of water, by lakes or streams having winding banks and clothed with beautiful foliage. His *clumps* were laughed at; and yet, gracefully disposed, no man can deny their charms, or say that they are not frequent in Nature's own scenery. We appeal to any person who has travelled, and possesses true taste, whether this view be not correct; and as for the principle of his *belts*,

assuming them to be tastefully arranged, why it is the principle of NATURE herself.

So far BROWN may be safely defended both on principle and in detail; but his highest merit beyond all question was the *foreknowing of the effects to be produced*. (Lindley, 1847: 235 [leader of 10 April 1847]).

Did Lindley's defence of Brown have any impact? Probably not. His leaders provoked no correspondence; the progress of historical revivalism continued unabated; even Lindley was converted to the cause of the enclosed garden once the Royal Horticultural Society's garden in Kensington, surrounded by arcades on three sides, was constructed. Lindley invoked the name of Brown only once more that I have traced, in 1850, in a denunciation of the state of the incipient landscape of Victoria Park, the new royal park in east London:

That is Victoria Park, that is what the country has paid 44,000*l.* for; that is what the inventive genius of the agents of the Woods and Forests has last offered to the public, as a sample of English landscape gardening. Ye shades of BROWN, of GILPIN, of REPTON, arise and denounce the perpetrators of this national offence! (Lindley, 1850).

This was, as far as I can determine, the last favourable reference to Capability Brown in the horticultural press in the nineteenth century.

Brown in the age of the formal garden

A century after his death, one might have expected Brown to have taken his place in the history of his subject; but what happened instead was a new phase of attack on his reputation, and the creation of a standardised piece of invective against Brown that determined his image for the next half-century.

In the years 1891–1892, two books appeared that were widely seen as inaugurating a new campaign for the formal garden: John D. Sedding's *Garden-craft Old and New*, published posthumously, and Reginald Blomfield's *The Formal Garden in England*. Both writers presented the idea of the formal garden as something new, or rather something old now revived; William Robinson was able to have some gleeful fun with Blomfield for having apparently not noticed that the most celebrated gardens of the Victorian period, like Chatsworth and the RHS Garden

in Kensington, were formal in design. But Blomfield's slogan meant something narrower than it seemed at face value: gardens which were not merely laid out geometrically, but in accordance with the rules of the seventeenth century, and based on the archaeological evidence of documentation and surviving gardens, not on the modern gardener's fancy. His vocabulary was polemical rather than historical; and so he could present "the landscape gardener", who planted exotic trees instead of measuring for garden walls, as the dominant figure in garden history from the early eighteenth century to the present. And Brown, while not the originator of the landscape style, took it to its height, or depth, of absurdity:

Kent was followed by "Capability" Brown, who began as a kitchen gardener, but took the judicious line that knowledge hampered originality. He accordingly dispensed with any training in design, and rapidly rose to eminence. Brown's notion of a landscape consisted of a park encircled by a belt of trees, a piece of ornamental water, and a clump – the latter indispensable; and on these lines he proceeded to cut down avenues and embellish nature with the utmost aplomb (Blomfield, 1892: 85).

Sedding dealt with Brown only as part of a group including Kent and the early Repton (though praising the later Repton, once he had become more critical of Brown). Sedding also launched the interesting argument that the origin of the landscape style was to be found in the number of exotic tree species that had been imported into England, which were allegedly difficult to display to their full advantage in the older formal gardens (Sedding, 1891: 98–99). (A century later, this non sequitur would be shifted forward; in the mid-twentieth century, it was often alleged that the Victorian garden had resulted from an inundation of plants, which somehow prevented gardeners from thinking about design.)

Within a few years of the publications of Blomfield and Sedding, the pioneering histories of gardening began to appear: Amherst's *History of Gardening in England* (1895), Triggs' *Garden Craft in Europe* (1913), Gothein's *Geschichte der Gartenkunst* (1914), Rohde's *Story of the Garden* (1932), all of which expressed enthusiasm for the formal gardens of the seventeenth century, and gave perfunctory or reluctant coverage to the landscape movement. But all managed to give space to the great

complaint: Brown had destroyed the masterpieces of the previous generations and deprived us of our heritage. Here is Amherst: “Old gardens in every part of England disappeared before the transforming influence of Brown, but luckily before many years had passed a reaction set in, or it is doubtful whether a single garden would have survived” (Amherst, 1895: 264). Triggs: “So completely did the landscape school of Kent and Brown obliterate all previous work that Repton, writing in 1806, declares that ‘no trace now remains’ of the Italian style of gardening” (Triggs, 1913: 291). And finally Rohde:

Had this school confined their energies to establishing new gardens their vagaries would have been harmless enough. But what must fill the least imaginative with horror is to think of the wanton destruction of fine old gardens, many of them established for centuries and full of interesting plants, the cutting down of trees and magnificent avenues, the wholesale destruction of orchards and so forth, perpetrated by the new school. The people who must have suffered most were the gardeners, who had to engage in the work of uprooting and cutting down their carefully tended treasures. Why our flower-loving nation tolerated such vandalism is hard to understand (Rohde, 1932: 199–200).

So when even the scholars were dismissive or condemning, it is not surprising that popular writing on garden history should follow Blomfield’s lead, and exaggerate his complaints, as in P.H. Ditchfield’s chatty book on *The Parson’s Pleasance* (1910):

There was naturally a revolt from this [17th-century] style of laying out gardens, which was far more formal than the formal style which it displaced. An ancient garden had avenues, alleys, stars, *pâtés-d’oye*, pelotons (square clumps), circular masses, rows, and strips; but this degenerated Brown-designed garden had only a belt, a clump, and a single tree (Ditchfield, 1910: 27).

This continued as a popular norm even after a new generation of scholars had revised their attitudes towards Brown. As late as 1958, we find Dorothea Eastwood complaining of the landscape garden (by implied contrast with the more recent woodland garden):

There they stood, these huge new Italianate dwellings, in an alien land, in the utterly alien surroundings of grasslands, planted with belts and clumps of oak and beech and elm, instead of in their own setting of walk and terrace, parterre and fountain, the dark green flames of cypresses and the groves of silvery olives; the oranges too, the roses and the vines and the warm reds and ochres of the soil, all were lacking; for the sense of colour was not yet awakened in those English improvers of the middle and late eighteenth century, although they stressed the variation in the greens of foliage. They also stressed light and shade, so far as the inconstant English sunshine would allow, but it was the serene radiance of Claude rather than the dramatic contrasts of Rosa of which Brown and his patrons dreamed. In their mind's eye they saw their newly transformed estates forever glowing in that golden and pellucid light in which the master bathes the still lake, the temple and groves of his creation. All must be gentle, calm, classic, with broad expanses of water in which to reflect this tranquillity (Eastwood, 1958: 55).

And, of course, Brown continued to be remembered as the destroyer of garden walls and avenues.

Brown in the age of the landscape revival

The onward course of historical revivalism in the nineteenth century had seen a steady progress of period styles adopted in approximately the chronological order of their original appearance. Elizabethan and Jacobean were succeeded by Stuart, and by the end of the century Christopher Wren and his rivals were the objects of emulation. All the gardens of these successive phases were formal and geometric, at least in overall layout. But the appearance of the landscape movement in the second quarter of the eighteenth century threw the linear progress of revivalism into confusion. While architects blithely moved on through the Georgian period seeking prototypes for their buildings, they could not bring themselves to abandon the cardinal principle of formality in the garden. The earliest neo-Georgian houses had gardens modelled on those of earlier generations, and when Lutyens created a new garden for a James Wyatt house, Ammerdown, he designed a delightful formal garden utterly at odds with the garden style with which Wyatt had been familiar.

But revivalism had its own inner necessities, and as the eighteenth century attracted the interest of historians, so, slowly and tentatively, did the landscape garden. The first publications to offer much detail were works by American literary scholars, safely removed from the stylistic controversies of contemporary England. Elizabeth Wheeler Manwaring published her *Italian Landscape in Eighteenth Century England* in 1925, advancing the hypothesis that the impetus for the landscape garden came from the paintings of Claude Lorrain and Salvator Rosa; she duly noted the criticisms of Capability Brown, but also described his critics as “captious gentlemen” (Manwaring, 1925: 140). A decade later came Beverly Sprague Allen’s immense *Tides in English Taste*, which took a rather more satirical, if even-handed, tone (Allen, 1937: II 193–194). In between these came the first English work which could count as a partial study of the landscape garden: Christopher Hussey’s *The Picturesque: Studies in a Point of View*, in 1927. Hussey’s main purpose was to discuss the debates over the picturesque that animated the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, but he had to include an account of the development of the landscape style in order to set the scene for the theories of Gilpin and Price, and so he devoted eight pages to a treatment of Capability Brown. Perhaps the whimsicality with which Brown was introduced reflects an anxiety at daring to look sympathetically at a longstanding hate figure:

Nature did her best to protect herself, by arranging that her woer-to-be should be born with the name of Brown. “At least,” she said, “if he does come and plague me, nobody will be foolish enough to think him one of those inspired artists – not with a name like that.” At his christening the fairies were divided upon what other name he should be given. But finally the romantic ones prevailed, and he was called Lancelot. “For,” they said, “he will fill the land with beautiful lakes, so we will name him after the Knight of the Lake.” “Very well, then,” said the minority, who wanted to call him Dick, or Tom, or Harry, “Lancelot be it.” But a powerful fairy, the Queen of Water Fairies and Laughing Moorland Streams, arose among the Opposition members and said, “You have given him his baptismal name. But we will give him a name by which all who come after shall know him. Your name will be given him at his birth and will be a token of his intentions. But our name will be given him when he dies, and will sum up his achievements.”

And so it came about that after a long and immensely successful career, during which thousands of square miles had been made far more Ideal and Beautiful than they had been before, poor Mr. Brown lost his splendid name Lancelot, and was known ever after as Capability.... But when his work came to maturity, alas people saw that Brown had only been a very capable gardener and not the flashing champion of nature after all. So everybody called him, as the fairy had prophesied, after his achievements – Capability (Hussey, 1927a: 135–136).

Hussey's interests lay mainly with Brown's successors and critics, so he had no intention of launching a campaign of rehabilitation; he continued the complaints about the destruction of formal gardens, and of monotony in design. "He was, in fact, that most dangerous phenomenon, a practical man inspired by a theory" (ibid.: 137). But he managed nonetheless to suggest that Brown belonged to the same rank of artistry as Poussin and Claude Lorrain:

Nevertheless, many intelligent men, whose view of painting was literary, regarded him as a great painter. If one considers that a Claude or Poussin merely took so many symbols of ideas, such as rocks for wildness, groves for solitude, a stream for coolness, waving lines for beauty and so on, and combined them into a landscape that consequently aroused all these ideas, then Brown was indeed a great painter on such principles (138).

Hussey became architectural editor of *Country Life* in 1930, and under his aegis more attention was focused on landscape in the coverage of gardens. But he had already set this trend going during the term of his predecessor, Avray Tipping. When *Country Life* published a report on Wimpole in 1908, its photographic coverage of the garden was limited to the Victorian jardinières and other things in the immediate vicinity of the house; but Hussey's article on the same estate in 1927 included photographs of the landscape garden (Tipping, 1908, Hussey, 1927b). And as garden designers, and the newly founded Institute of Landscape Architects, began tentatively to make views of the wider landscape a theme in new developments, the foundations were being laid for a more sympathetic approach to Brown and his coevals. Here the major figure

was Ralph Dutton, who in the 1930s began to introduce more extensive views in his garden at Hinton Ampner, and who in 1937 published the first history of gardens to give the eighteenth century a degree of coverage equal to that accorded to earlier periods.

“Capability” Brown, the greatest practical exponent of the landscape style, is very generally abused for his destruction of formal gardens and is seldom awarded his due degree of praise for the beauty he introduced into the English countryside. By drawing interest from the confined area of the garden to the almost unlimited spaces of the park, and by encouraging landowners to undertake vast schemes of planting, he conferred a benefit on the landscape which can hardly be exaggerated. Under his influence and that of his followers, as well as rivals, millions of trees were planted during the late eighteenth century; if that period had been as barren as the present, when the majority of landowners consider that they have made sufficient gesture to posterity by planting a dozen young trees in their parks or a hundred larch on their estates, the face of England would have presented a very different aspect at the present day. In many cases trees planted in the eighteenth century are now passing their prime so that, unless young trees are introduced to give vitality to mature parks, the country may find itself fifty years hence relying for arboreal beauty on the prim and parsimonious clumps of the Victorians (Dutton, 1937: 4).

And it was Dutton who finally produced a laudatory valuation of Brown: “His system, which was an immediate development of Kent’s theories, produced some of the most beautiful parks which have ever been seen, and can only be criticised on the score of a certain lack of invention” (*ibid.*: 89).

The journey from contempt through grudging respect to enthusiasm can be traced with startling speed in the pages of *Landscape and Garden*, the prewar journal of the Institute of Landscape Architects. The first volumes contained various slighting references, but with the third volume, the year of Ralph Dutton’s publication, we find references to Brown’s magnificent parks, and in the fourth volume the first biographical article about Brown, by H.S. Reid, complete with encomium:

Brown is that favourite of the age, the Noble Savage, sweeping away the ancient pedantries, clipped hedge, pleached walk, terrace and fountain, restoring England to her natural wildness.

In a world over-run with crazy pavement, bird baths, tennis courts, gaudily coloured shrubs and the riches of flora too lavishly strewn, imagination yearns for the simple spacious paradise of Capability Brown (Reid, 1938: 21).

Another year on, and Edward White, one of the leading landscape architects in the country, made the strongest claim for Brown yet:

Capability Brown was the destroyer-in-chief of priceless examples of English garden art. That is as it may be – maybe also Brown has been hardly judged. It is more than likely that much the same thing would have happened if he had never lived.

As a matter of fact, Brown was not the originator of English landscape gardening. He became its chief exponent, and expressed in terms of garden art the pastoral romanticism that was the vogue of that period.

At any rate it is to Brown's credit that the type of landscape he perfected has been claimed as the most characteristic of English rural beauty. The present-day complaint of its destruction is in reality recognition of his life work (White, 1938: 154).

The years after the Second World War saw the publication of the first historical work devoted to the landscape movement – Frank Clark's *English Landscape Garden* (1947), followed three years later by the first edition of Dorothy Stroud's biography. Geoffrey Taylor greeted this work with the statement that "if a great Englishman has waited long for a worthy biography, he has not waited in vain" (Taylor, 1951). And in 1960 came the next standard work on garden history, Miles Hadfield's *Gardening in Britain*, which reprised Edward White's terms of praise:

Brown is criticized for the destruction that he wrought before he created: for the avenues felled and the handiwork of his predecessors that he obliterated. That is true enough, but economics have, unfortunately, proved him right. The wooded glades have provided timber to pay death duties; his designs, so dependent on the ha-ha

... have, beyond the 'lawn's brief limit', provided grazing on which 'the fleecy foragers will gladly browse' and valuable pasturage for cattle sheltered from wind and sun by the Kentian clumps (Hadfield, 1960: 213).

The 1960s saw the name of Capability Brown enter the newspapers, as the first campaigns were launched for the preservation of Brown landscapes from damage or destruction. In 1968, a garden centre was opened at Syon Park, and the Landscape Institute's journal attacked the result:

The hope that this could be grafted on to the Capability Brown Landscape without serious damage has proved in the circumstances difficult to achieve. It remains to be seen what reaction Brown's sylvan glades have to this commercial development under their beautiful branches. ... The sweeping lawns cut up into fussy rose beds in the normal municipal gardening tradition will cause pain to sensitive observers, who remember the calm, restrained, setting which Syon House has enjoyed since the eighteenth century (Capability, 1968).

The Garden History Society had been founded in 1965, and it was not long before it was called into action over the encroachment of motorways through Brown parks, beginning with the Petworth Bypass proposals in 1972; David Jacques emerged as the Society's principal negotiator and proposer of alternative routes that would leave the views intact. One result of all this was an increasing public recognition of a distinctive name, no longer confined to the worlds of academia or of the landscape profession. From 1967, the leader writer of *Landscape Design* wrote under the name of Capability. In 1973, the first published anthology of *Mastermind* questions included one about "the great British landscape designer of the eighteenth century" (Brown, of course; who had heard of William Kent?). From the 1970s the name "Capability Brown" was used as part of a title by companies in Britain, America, and New Zealand, including Capability Brown Ltd, a garden centre in Liss; another Capability Brown Ltd, a grass seed firm in Godalming from 2002–2005; Capability Brown and Family Ltd of Derby, agricultural services and landscape construction (2003–2009); Capability Brown Garden Centres, and Capability Brown Landscaping Ltd, both launched in Elland in 2010; not to mention firms of

human resources consultants, investment consultants, and hairdressers. And let us not forget Practicality Brown, tree and hedge suppliers in Iver, and the Great Newsome Brewery near Hull, which produces an ale called “Incapability Brown”.

Called into question again

By the late 1970s, it might be thought, Brown’s status as a major figure in British garden history had been established unambiguously. But another wave of interest, both academic and practical, in the formal garden had been growing, and it took very public form in 1979 with the opening of the Victoria and Albert Museum’s blockbuster exhibition *The Garden*. This was the third in a series of exhibitions about the loss of Britain’s built heritage, preceded by *The Destruction of the Country House* and *Change and Decay* (about the destruction of churches), all organised by the conservationist trio of Roy Strong, John Harris, and Marcus Binney. *The Garden* was built around the loss of, and current threats to, formal gardens of various periods; two books on such gardens were published to coincide with the exhibition, Roy Strong’s *Elizabethan Garden in England* and Binney’s *Elysian Gardens*, with aerial photographs of now vanished Victorian parterres, while Harris was planning a book on late Stuart gardens. Although Strong pointed out in a publicity article that a portrait of Capability Brown would be included (Strong, 1979), the book of the exhibition contained no article on the landscape garden, and no plans by Brown or his fellow improvers were included in the display. During the press launch, one of the organisers was heard to say “Down with Capability Brown”, *non sotto voce*, during the talks.

What was the impact of this attempt to remove Brown from the pageant of garden history? Geoffrey Jellicoe sprang to Brown’s defence, in reviewing Strong’s book on Elizabethan gardens:

Although Dr Strong’s dislike of Capability Brown and the destruction that left so little of the earlier formal gardens is understandable in so great an admirer of the Renaissance, the fact remains that the English Landscape School at its best has been the only indigenous landscape art that can compare with those of the continent. We are justly proud of it and must say so in no uncertain terms to the distinguished Director of the Victoria and Albert Museum (Jellicoe, 1980: 41).

But a few years later, Hal Moggridge could complain that the bicentenary of Brown's death had failed to produce the expected celebrations, and pointed a finger of partial blame:

Though this year is the bicentenary of 'Capability' Brown's death in 1783, his great contribution to the European imagination has received scant attention outside Northumberland. Indeed only five years ago the Victoria and Albert Museum excluded his work from their garden exhibition with the quaint explanation that 'Brown's art and genius was entirely one of modulating ground, trees and water', as if it were possible to design a garden satisfactorily without such art (Moggridge, 1983: 432).

There was definitely, over the next decade and more, a shift of scholarly emphasis to the formal gardens of the other eras, but the creation of English Heritage and the establishment of the Register of Historic Parks and Gardens meant that works of all periods could soon claim protected status. Restoration projects over the next quarter-century ranged from Wrest Park (end of the seventeenth century) to Audley End and Waddesdon Manor (nineteenth). Any feelings of rivalry between the styles of Brown, his predecessors, and his successors, came to be purely academic, without alarming consequences in the real world. So the anti-Brown passions of c.1980 ceased to agitate. Thirty years on, after a growing body of work by David Jacques, John Phibbs, and other scholars, it can hardly be said that Brown is suffering from neglect in the tercentenary year of his birth. Not only have we seen a number of distinguished and innovative publications about him this year, but there is even a set of commemorative stamps to fix him further in the public memory. There is nothing like a prominent anniversary to focus public attention.

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