

An aerial photograph of a golf course. The course features several green fairways with distinct mowed stripes, numerous sand traps, and clusters of trees with varying shades of green and yellow. In the upper right, a large, multi-story clubhouse with a grey roof and a parking lot filled with cars is visible. A paved road runs diagonally through the lower right portion of the image.

Vulnerability Brown Capability Brown landscapes at risk

A short report by the Gardens Trust



Portrait of Lancelot 'Capability' Brown, c. 1770-75, Cosway, Richard (1742-1821) (Private Collection / Bridgeman Images)

Cover image: aerial photograph of Moor Park, Hertfordshire, showing the impact of golf courses and parking on the Brown landscape.
(© Historic England Archive 29859-031)



Preface

Following the 2016 [Capability Brown Festival](#) it is timely to reflect on the conservation challenges and opportunities facing the core of the collection of Brown's landscapes, which is unique to Britain and Ireland. As part of the Festival legacy the Gardens Trust (formerly the Garden History Society and Association of Gardens Trusts), with support from Historic England, has commissioned this review of the issues facing the survival of these landscapes as well as suggested solutions.

[The Gardens Trust](#) was formed in 2015 from the merger of the Garden History Society and the Association of Gardens Trusts. It has inherited the GHS role as a national amenity society and a statutory consultee on planning applications affecting parks and gardens on the national Register of Parks and Gardens. It is also the umbrella group for the network of County Gardens Trusts in England and Wales and has a sister organisation in Scotland.

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This report was written by Dr Sarah Rutherford and Sarah Couch with guidance and input from the Gardens Trust. Both the authors are experienced landscape historians and have expertise in the conservation of historic landscapes and in the planning issues they face. Sarah Rutherford is an acknowledged expert in the work of Lancelot Brown, having written the National Trust's book to celebrate his tercentenary in 2016. She has published widely on the subject of historic landscapes.

Acknowledgements

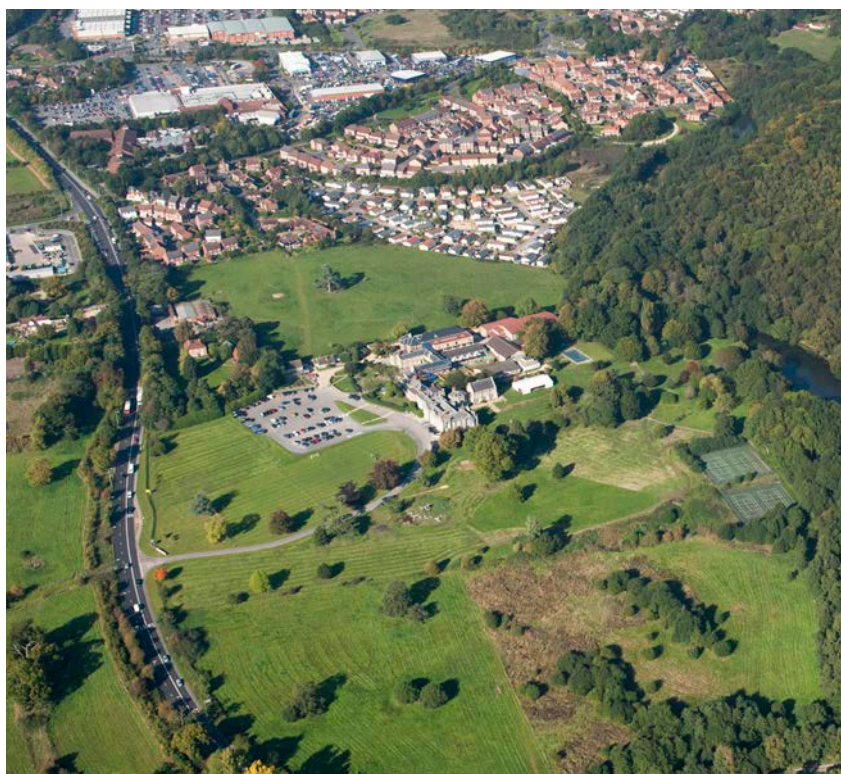
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Image credits are given in brackets after the caption.





Heveningham Hall (Suffolk, registered Grade II*) is a classic Brown landscape. In 1781 Lancelot 'Capability' Brown was commissioned to improve the grounds here in his last two years. It remains in private ownership as a family home. The present owner has over the last two decades restored the Grade-I listed hall and returned the landscape to Brown's design including purchasing former parts of the estate to reassemble the park and implementing the Brown-designed serpentine extension to the lake. (© Historic England Archive 29475-042)



Surviving Brown sites

209 potential sites with a strong attribution

200 survive

85% survive relatively intact

11% survive in part

4% completely destroyed

By contrast, Sandleford Priory (Berkshire, Grade II) is in divided ownership and much of the site has been developed. It is on Historic England's Heritage at Risk Register. (© Historic England Archive 29697-028)

Introduction

'Capability' Brown! He was and remains the face of the English Landscape Style, characterised by sweeping parkland. His work is the best of this great British innovation. Lancelot Brown (1716-83) was Britain's greatest, and most prolific landscape gardener. His unique legacy is some 200 landscape parks from an artistic and horticultural revolution with worldwide reach. [The tercentenary of his birth](#) was celebrated to great acclaim nationally and internationally in 2016. Media coverage reached a staggering audience of nearly 300 million across the UK and the world. Yet despite recent successes, economic uncertainty persists and the Gardens Trust sees that his landscapes are still at risk and are still being damaged.

Historic parks and gardens are a key part of our cultural heritage and have been influential worldwide. As works of art they are uniquely and often extensively accessible, both visually and physically, and partly because of this their multiple values tend to be overlooked. Brown's parks are the acme of the English Landscape Style, but serious damage has already been inflicted on many of them.

The danger is not past; if anything, the threats are increasing.

The secret of Brown's success

One of the most remarkable men in an age of pioneering talent, Brown was engaging, capable, humorous and hugely productive, but shunned the limelight. His masterpieces speak for him: parks and pleasure grounds for great country houses. Although from humble yeoman stock, his extraordinary client list included the king (George III), six prime ministers and half the House of Lords. In the eighteenth century the conditions were perfect for self-made men with drive to succeed. Brown was a polymath with a unique coincidence of talents and skills that ensured his success: a great artist in natural materials at an extraordinary scale, an engineer and competent businessman, with a genial personality and uncommon honesty, which cemented his success with clients.

Rebelling against the early-eighteenth century rigidity of styles imported from France and Italy, Brown's landscape is a garden in the broadest sense. He did not invent the style, and there are many great landscape parks that he did not design, but he had the enormous talent to make the most of every site and his greatest designs are breathtaking. He was the right man, in the right place at the right time, with the artistic genius and business sense to harness the Zeitgeist. We are fortunate that so many of his great, and even lesser, works survive.

The formula of a Brown park

Brown's unique designs flowed around the country house, framing ornamental pleasure grounds, seamlessly set in rural parkland, often focussed on a lake and planted with specimen trees and clumps, the pasture grazed by agricultural livestock and thoroughbred horses. They were both ornamental and natural-looking with views into the countryside beyond. It was a productive landscape which nurtured wildlife and [biodiversity](#) in its managed mosaic of woody planting, ancient trees, wild flower-strewn sward, and wetland habitats. Many of his buildings survive including houses, stables, garden buildings and churches. The comfortable and emotionally satisfying structure of wide open vistas with scattered trees has been valued across generations and is still popular.

Brown's legacy

It is easy to experience Brown's legacy. Many of us have visited Brown's best landscapes, which survive remarkably well. Eighteen belong to the National Trust, including Croome, Prior Park and Berrington Hall; there are local authority run country parks like Combe Abbey near Coventry and Thorndon at Brentwood; and many in private hands are open to the public such as Chatsworth, Petworth and Alnwick Castle. Many others can be seen at no cost from roads and public footpaths.

Brown's best parks represent the pinnacle of the English Landscape Style and have influenced designers and park makers worldwide ever since. They even influenced the design of public parks and still do so, as at Queen Elizabeth II Olympic Park. If people have heard of one landscape designer, it is 'Capability' Brown. His work has a worldwide resonance and far-reaching recognition.

Many Brown landscapes have survived 250 years. They have been cherished, sustained and then augmented with later important historic design layers and many have had to accommodate great change. Only a handful have been completely destroyed, mostly around London; more survive as fragments. But while they are appreciated in general terms, the detail and skill of the designs are little understood, which makes them vulnerable to harmful alteration and neglect.

The scope of this review

Because Brown's work is largely in England (with a few parks in Wales), our focus is the threats facing the essential qualities of Brown's English parks. Information comes from the Gardens Trust planning casework log from 2002 onwards, the recent [list of sites](#) attributed to Brown by John Phibbs, research undertaken by County Gardens Trusts as part of the Capability Brown Festival and other readily available sources.

The essential features of a Brown Park make it vulnerable



Grazed parkland

Parkland is easily lost to arable production; it forms the essential 'soft' landscape of pasture and planting which is more fragile than the better protected 'hard' built landscape.

Parkland under cultivation, Beechwood (Hertfordshire, unregistered) (Kate Harwood)



Parkland trees

Carefully positioned clumps and belts of favoured grand species such as beech and oak are now at least 250 years old and ageing. Species may succumb to invasive new pests and diseases as well as climate change. Their loss and inappropriate replanting change the character, structure and views.

Fallen cedar Dyrham Park (Hertfordshire, unregistered) (Kate Harwood)



Distant views

Screened and framed by buildings and planting, key views designed into, across and out of a landscape park are vulnerable to overgrown vegetation, new planting that does not follow Brown's scheme, new building and loss of framing planting. As buildings get taller, distant buildings can have unexpected damaging consequences for Brown's vision.

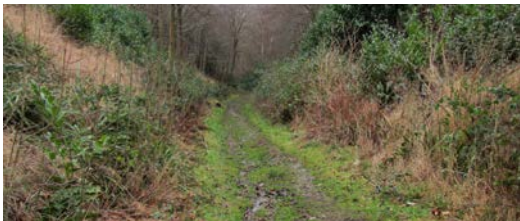
Wotton Underwood (Buckinghamshire, I) intact Brown vista reopened 2016 (Charles Boot)



Great lakes

Lakes are Brown's hallmark but they are a constant draw on resources, particularly from siltation, engulfing by reeds and scrub, changes in hydrology and requirements of the Reservoirs Act, which may lead to invasive works to banks and dams with clearance of designed trees and ugly reinforcement of dams.

Pishiobury Park (Hertfordshire, II) overgrown and invisible lake (Kate Harwood)



Winding drives

Drives, with their progression of views, are vulnerable to destruction and changes in planting and may fall out of use, altering the intended access.

Milton Abbey (Dorset, II) abandoned drive (Sarah Rutherford)*



Large kitchen gardens

Walled kitchen gardens are ideal places for filling with cars, houses, garden centres or other buildings, but this destroys impressive, walled spaces and the intention of a large productive garden.

Compton Verney (Warwickshire, II) housing in walled garden (Sarah Rutherford)*



Park and garden buildings

Brown's buildings, both functional and ornamental, are not well researched and have not always been valued, suffering neglect and loss. Often they have no viable economic use and are left to decay. Farm buildings and dwellings are also under-recorded.

Temple Newsam (Yorkshire, II) derelict Temple (Sarah Rutherford)



Setting

Because views were designed outwards to distant landmarks, a landscape park's setting extends well beyond its hard boundaries. Insensitive development in its setting can cause profound damage.

High rise buildings in setting of Syon Park (west London, I) (Sarah Rutherford)

THE THREATS

Lack of knowledge and the skills drain

Brown's elusive designs

Part of the difficulty is understanding quite what Brown did. 'Reading' the detail and scope of his work on site is not always easy or obvious. The subtle nuances and significances of his landscape designs may not be clear. Like the landscape gardens he created, it is as if he is hiding while in plain view, the 'unknowable' Capability Brown. Plans, contracts, bills for plants and accounts which could help have often been lost or scattered; unlike his successor, self-publicist Humphry Repton (1752 – 1818), he did not publish his theories. In looking at specific sites, we often have to resort to scrutinising his surviving landscaping and circumstantial evidence based on what he did elsewhere. The extensive research inspired by the Capability Brown Festival covered many parks and led to new attributions, such as Spring Hill (Gloucestershire, II). New research can contribute to designation and additions to the list of locally significant sites that can be included in local authorities' development plans. However much archival and site research remains to be done as well as overall analysis of his work across England and Wales. Understanding the entirety of his work would help to set each of his commissions in context and appraise their significance more accurately. If we have this problem with parks we know are by Brown, then other landscape parks are still more vulnerable.

The great scale of Brown's landscape parks as works of art is difficult to comprehend. They are the largest works of art we have and taking in their artistry and extent is not easy. Most people fail to understand that these hundreds of acres equate to the whole canvas of an Old Master painting, in which to damage or lose a section, however bland artistically, is unthinkable.

The best way to understand the whole landscape and harness what we do know of Brown in each case is the [Conservation Management Plan \(CMP\)](#). A well thought-out CMP goes a long way towards understanding the most important aspects of Brown's design and can be an essential tool in protection from harmful change and accommodating appropriate change. It should point out key significances and features it is essential to protect, including the less tangible such as views and setting. But many Brown sites have no CMP. Without such expert analysis and guidance Brown's parks are vulnerable to damaging change.

Over 40% of Brown sites do not have a Conservation Management Plan

Brown's buildings

Brown's great renown as an architect of country house estates has receded. It needs rehabilitating. Dozens, perhaps hundreds, of his buildings included magnificent country houses such as Claremont (Surrey, II, park I), Croome Court (Worcestershire, I) and Broadlands (Hampshire, II, park II*) and fine but lesser estate buildings such as chapels, stable blocks, orangeries, summerhouses, many walled gardens and lodges. A few have been lost, such as Clandon Park stable block, but many survive, albeit it not widely recognised. The rare D-shaped kitchen garden designed by Brown at Berrington Court (Herefordshire) is not even listed.

Understanding his buildings singly and as a group would help to retain their significances during repair or change. An appraisal and comprehensive detailed gazetteer would enhance local and national designations including the National Heritage List for England.

Brown's buildings are even less well understood than his landscapes

The skills drain

Brown landscapes are under constant threat of change. Large parks can absorb some changes without great damage but they need a degree of understanding to protect what is essential to the design, fabric, views and the wider setting in which they sit: it takes enormous skill, time and effort to resist damaging development successfully.

Poor understanding of Brown's sites is compounded by a skills drain. The scarcity of expert advice is a worsening threat, with a lack of resources to assess planning applications competently, both in local authorities and in the voluntary sector, particularly the Gardens Trust and County Gardens Trusts. The appropriate specialist advice from local authorities, as well as Historic England, is not always available. Local authority Conservation Officers are now rare, especially those with landscape skills, leaving decision-makers without in-house advice on complex matters affecting Brown sites. This piles still more pressure on the voluntary sector, members of which are passionate about doing their best for Brown landscapes but are thinly spread and can't always keep up with the relentless pressure to assess applications.

Demoralisation sets in when local planning authorities ignore considered and reasonable comments or do not give them full weight. Added to this, many sites struggle with a shortage of skilled horticultural and landscape management teams.

Doddington Park



Doddington Park (East Cheshire, II) (Barbara Moth)

In 1778 Sir Thomas Broughton paid Brown for 'A General Plan for the alterations of this Place' as well as unexecuted plans for the house.

The park now has few remaining trees and the pasture is now intensive arable agriculture.

In 2015 the Gardens Trust was not consulted on the application to convert the house to a hotel and Cheshire Gardens Trust drew this to the authority's attention and went on to remark:

As (probably) the only site in the whole of the historic county of Cheshire to retain elements of a landscape design by Lancelot (Capability) Brown we consider that the landscape proposals submitted would have a serious adverse impact on the Hall and grounds because they demonstrate a lack of understanding of Doddington's historic landscape and a failure to ascertain their significance as required by NPPF [National Planning Policy Framework] para 128.

At the Cheshire Gardens Trust's behest a condition was included in granting permission for the hotel development:

The landscaping scheme shall be informed by a full Historical Assessment of the historic park and garden, detailing, inter alia, the involvement of Capability Brown in the original design, layout and construction, by a suitably qualified expert.

In 2016 -2017 there were applications for 102 dwellings. The Gardens Trust commented:

The applicant asserts that the funds released by the proposals for 102 new dwellings in 12 locations is sufficient to meet the shortfall in funds and that there will be no other enabling development applications in the future. We would like to see conditions placed upon the application should it be approved, that this statement is adhered to.

Unfortunately experience shows that one enabling development is often followed by another, which may happen in this case, often resulting in devastating damage to Brown's designs.



The oak nearest the hall has been confirmed as Cheshire's champion Quercus cerris, dating to the eighteenth century (Barbara Moth)

Grade I Doddington Hall, Grade I Delves Hall and the Grade II* barn are all at risk

Protection and its limits

Protecting Brown's landscapes from irreversible and significant harm is almost impossible, it seems, unless existing tools are used more effectively. The planning system is the main tool, and designations raise awareness of Brown's connection. However this does not offer a reliable shield, especially if expert advice is absent.

National recognition

The good news is that much of Brown's nationally important work is recognised by inclusion in Historic England's *Register of Parks and Gardens of special historic interest* and information is available online in the [National Heritage List for England](#). National recognition is improving with three Brown sites added in 2016 and 2017: Stoke Place (Buckinghamshire, II), Peper Harow (Surrey, II) and Wakefield Lodge Park, (Northamptonshire, II). Wotton Underwood (Buckinghamshire) was upgraded to Grade I as an outstanding example of an eighteenth-century country house landscape.

However the national significance of some of his parks has not yet been recognised by this designation, leaving these works of art still more vulnerable to damaging changes made without sufficient understanding. While roughly 150 sites with strong Brown connections are registered by Historic England as nationally important and are therefore recognised in the planning system, some 50 have no such designation and a significant proportion may well be of national importance.

Despite being a 'material consideration', registration is relatively weak in the protection it offers compared to the more robust consent regimes of listed buildings or Conservation Areas. The Register designation is still poorly recognised, particularly by owners, developers and their advisers. Even Local Planning Authorities sometimes neglect their obligation to consult the Gardens Trust, a statutory consultee on applications for registered sites, and the impact on essential setting and key views from them is often overlooked. In many cases Brown's landscape is given lesser weight than historic buildings in planning decisions.

It is immensely troubling that well over 1,000 planning applications affecting Brown's nationally important sites were made since 2002, affecting about two thirds of them. This is probably a considerable underestimate of the true number of applications. It is extraordinary that the Gardens Trust's weekly list of planning applications received usually features Brown sites, sometimes as many as 25% of cases. The Gardens Trust's role in advising decision-makers on the effect of these applications is crucial, as Historic England only considers applications affecting Grade I and II* sites (about 40%) or those deemed at risk.

Registered and non-registered Brown sites

200 surviving sites
with a strong attribution

75% registered

35 Grade I

57 Grade II*

62 Grade II

25% unregistered

Many of Brown's designs are of the highest grade, Grade I, including Blenheim, Alnwick and Wimpole. The high proportion of Grade I and II* sites indicates the significance of Brown landscapes. Some sites, such as Heveningham (II*) (see photograph on page 2) which has been beautifully restored since the register entry was written, are strong candidates for upgrading in the view of the Gardens Trust.

Local recognition

The 25% of Brown parks which are not registered are even less well understood and more vulnerable to damaging change. County Gardens Trusts and local historians have a major role to play in raising awareness at all levels of significance so that they may be included by local authorities in informative 'local lists', Local Plans and Historic Environment Records, and also the national Parks & Gardens UK database which is available to all. However many authorities do not have adopted Local Plans, meaning they are less able to control development, even if the significance of Brown sites is understood.

Hatfield Forest, Essex has one of Brown's early landscapes at the heart of the 400 ha. medieval forest. His high quality design is a case where the national significance is not yet recognised on the Register of Parks and Gardens. Because Uttlesford District Council does not have an adopted Local Plan, this outstanding place is threatened by piecemeal development nearby, greatly increasing the number of residents, and in turn the local visitor numbers. Significant, and eventually irreversible damage from pressure of numbers affects the historic fabric, particularly around Brown's lake.

A park designed by our most important designer does not mean it is protected!



At Kew, recent high buildings have seriously damaged views in the now urban setting, and more are threatened. Increasing the buffer zone to include Syon Park, another great Grade I Brown landscape, as a minor boundary change in the main KewWorld Heritage Site would help to increase awareness of the impact on Brown's work and its high significance. (Keith Garner)



Brown's stables at Clandon Park (Surrey) were a prominent feature in the landscape. They were demolished in the 1960s. (©Historic England Archive)

Six Brown parks on the Historic England Heritage at Risk Register 2016:

Brocklesby (Lincolnshire, I) which includes buildings at risk
 Fawley Court (Buckinghamshire, II*)
 Tottenham and Savernake (Wiltshire, II*)

Clandon Park (Surrey, II)
 Sandeford Priory (Berkshire, II)
 Wimbledon Park (London, II*)

Other sites associated with Brown, including Trentham Gardens (II*) Doddington Hall (II) and Stowe (I) contain buildings at risk.



Clandon Park is on the Historic England Heritage at Risk Register due to extensive significant problems. It suffers from divided ownership, loss of park trees and the Brown-designed stables (illustrated above right). The stables stood to the left of the walled garden, now housing a garden centre. The house bottom right was gutted by fire in 2015. (© Historic England Archive 29866-030)

Local recognition - Conservation Areas

The strongest and most effective designation tool for Brown's parks is the local authority-designated Conservation Area. This confers protection on a wide range of his features including buildings, trees, drives and setting. A few parks are completely covered, such as Melton Constable Park in North Norfolk which is also II* registered. Other sites are only partly covered, such as Clandon (Surrey, II). Many more could be designated in this way and it would be a great help in protecting Brown's landscape designs.

Global recognition - World Heritage Sites

Three Grade I Brown landscapes are already included in World Heritage Sites, but not specifically for Brown's contribution: the Royal Botanic Gardens Kew; Prior Park (Bath); and his most important park, Blenheim (Oxfordshire).

ICOMOS-UK is consulted on applications affecting these sites, and providing this national charity with local knowledge about the effect of proposals on sites can be invaluable, but like other advisers it has very limited resources. World Heritage Site 'buffer zones' help planners identify damaging development in the landscape setting and views but this is not always prevented.

As a national collection Brown's sites are of worldwide importance. ICOMOS-UK is undertaking a thematic review of the English Landscape Style, including Brown's contribution, as a potential UK nomination for World Heritage Site inscription. The Gardens Trust will contribute to this review.

Historic England's Heritage at Risk Register

Historic England's [Heritage at Risk](#) programme is designed to help understand the overall state of England's historic sites and monuments. It identifies important sites that are most at risk of being lost as a result of neglect, decay or inappropriate development but it is very selective with rigorous criteria. What it cannot reflect is that many more Brown sites outside its criteria are also vulnerable to damaging change and loss.

Change of ownership poses risks

Major change often follows change in ownership. For instance, in 2017 there is uncertainty over the ownership of such important sites as Nuneham Courtenay, (Oxfordshire, I) and the BBC is due to sell Caversham Park (Berkshire, II).

Changes in ownership and use

Types of ownership

Brown's parks were designed for the families of wealthy private owners living in the country house at their core. The parks were united by a single design, ownership and management. Their design unity was underpinned by economic unity. Agricultural depressions during the nineteenth century, the first World War's impact on both estate workers and the families of estate owners, and the introduction of death duties and taxation targeted at the wealthy after the second World War, have all delivered significant blows to that unity. Houses have been demolished and estates have been subdivided and often partially redeveloped as a result. Many of Brown's estates have changed from private family homes to other types of ownership and use, with the threat of major change to his design. Today's owners are as varied as mineral extraction companies, educational institutions, prisons, charitable trusts, hotels, local authorities, and multiple private owners of housing developments.

Ownership of Brown Parks

roughly...

62% wholly privately owned

8% publicly owned (public/country parks)

7% owned by the National Trust

17% in divided ownership (public/ private/ Trusts/ National Trust/ English Heritage)

3% owned by other Trusts

Examples of public ownership include Ampthill (Bedfordshire), Belhus (Essex), Foots Cray (London), Wimbledon Park (London), Kings Weston (Bristol), Himley Hall (Staffordshire) and Temple Newsam (Yorkshire).



Funding opportunities: Euston Hall ***a privately owned estate that has benefitted from Stewardship funding***

Euston Hall (Suffolk, II) (Sarah Rutherford)*

Brown remodelled the water features at Euston Hall in the 1770s for the 3rd Duke of Grafton, creating the serpentine Broadwater, basin and weir, expanding William Kent's system of small lakes. The spectacular lake is 2 kilometres long and has a central island, designed to give views back towards the house through the trees. With the help of grants from Natural England and English Heritage, the 12th Duke of Grafton restored the weirs, pools and rivers, removing around 500,000 cubic metres of silt. Brown's original waterway plans were used in carrying out restoration work to the basin and Broadwater in 2012-2013, improving important historic views in the park and benefitting the environment. The watermill which also pumped water to supply fountains, was redesigned by William Kent and some attribute elements to Brown's style; it was restored with the assistance of English Heritage during 2000 -2001. The estate has benefitted from a series of Higher Level Stewardship agreements and a CMP was completed in 2011.

Divided ownership is a major risk

Sales and subdivision are not subject to planning control and there is evidence that sites are changing hands more rapidly

There seems to be no effective mechanism or incentive to owners to develop joint Conservation Management Plans or masterplans for divided sites



Left: multiple buildings in the divided park at Fawley Court, (Bucks, II) on the Heritage at Risk Register and in divided ownership.
Right: new school building visible from the Temple of Venus at Stowe (Bucks, Grade I) (Sarah Rutherford)*

Private ownership

Fortunately, beyond the Home Counties and outside metropolitan areas of high development pressure, most Brown sites remain in private ownership, and the majority of these in single ownership. However, privately owned estates face major economic pressure. A fine parkland sensitively managed as an agricultural estate provides a relatively low economic return. Park features need continuous management and repair to sustain them, with each park potentially containing lakes, numerous buildings, walls and boundary walls, and centuries-old trees and woodland. Often small garden buildings have no viable revenue-raising possibility unlike larger buildings that can be put to other uses, generating capital and revenue. Some owners are prepared and able to fund conservation out of their own pockets but these are gradually disappearing, and many owners require their part of a Brown landscape to raise a significant financial return and to be economically self-supporting.

Divided ownership

Many Brown landscapes are now in multiple ownership and are subject to divided management and sometimes very different uses or aspirations, even if all are private owners. Divided sites feature highly as an issue in the Historic England Heritage at Risk Register. Brown's united concept, valued and maintained by the single owner after Brown left, is lost when the sections are managed in isolation. An example of good practice is Gatton Park (Surrey, II), where the Royal Alexandra and Albert School and the National Trust work together on views and planting, and developed a shared circular walk, with the help of the Surrey Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

Ownership by a charitable trust often changes the main purpose of the grounds and brings pressures anew, whether in maintaining Brown's artistic contribution or blurring it with additions. One charity in many respects is a great national saviour of Brown landscapes. The [National Trust](#), owning eighteen Brown masterpieces, is nevertheless under enormous pressure to increase visitor numbers. Accommodating large and relentless numbers of visitors even in a large Brown landscape such as Ickworth (Suffolk), Croome (Worcestershire), or Berrington (Herefordshire) is damaging. Resultant damage includes swathes of car parking and related infrastructure, extensive visitor facilities, often with new buildings in the landscape. A recent National Trust programme of new cycle routes risks confusing the historic drives and paths, so carefully designed for views.

Institutions and schools

Institutions require the flexibility to respond to ever-changing demands within tight budgets, making it hard to follow a long term masterplan. If heritage is not their core purpose it is relegated as a priority. The incremental impact of frequent and often large-scale change associated with institutions, especially educational and medical, can be severe. The landscape is commonly seen as a sacrificial element in achieving the core goals of the institution when it requires new infrastructure, and in preserving the listed historic buildings, which form a perpetual drain on resources. Educational bodies often need to upgrade facilities, enlarge campuses and car parking, and provide new accommodation. The attrition rate is high, with a constant stream of applications that builds into major damage to Brown's work.



An accretion of school buildings, sports facilities and arable fields detract from the character of Langley Park, Norfolk. In 2009 the Garden History Society wrote of their regret 'that there has been ad hoc and detrimental development at Langley School over the years, leading to a significant degradation of its important historic landscape asset.' (© Historic England Archive 2991 I-027)



Langley Park (Buckinghamshire, IL): a country park restored with the help of the Heritage Lottery Fund.
(© Historic England Archive 24785-049)



Pishiobury Park (Hertfordshire, IL)
A public park where the Brown lake is very overgrown. (Kate Harwood)



Brown as a selling point in damaging schemes

In July 2017 the Brown connection was proudly used to advertise a golf course at Luton Hoo (Bedfordshire, IL*)

Today's Golfer
NEWS Win lessons & a pro-am spot at Luton Hoo. The 7,107-yard golf course is one of the longest 18-hole golf courses in the UK. With nine holes built on Capability Brown landscape, the immaculate course offers subtly challenging landscapes including six holes with water obstacles.

At Ayno (Northamptonshire, IL), there are plans for several large new dwellings perched high with views over the park are enticingly named *Capability*, *Repton* and *Soane* in the sales particulars.

Digging up Brown parks

Landscape parks have long been subject to mineral extraction, with Brown's designs no exception.

The Gardens Trust commented on proposed gravel extraction affecting Ditton Park (Berkshire, IL): 'it seems ironic that in 2015 the year before the tercentenary Brown celebrations, the setting of a rare surviving example of Brownian landscape within Berkshire should be at risk'.

Left: Panshanger (Hertfordshire, IL) (Friends of Panshanger Park)*

Public ownership

Local authority-owned country parks and public parks have often been managed for recreation and nature conservation rather than the historic design and have suffered from lack of funds. The gentle decay of an under-funded Brown landscape may be preferable to irreversible major changes, as the essential fabric remains for sensitive restoration. Heritage Lottery (HLF) funding is available to public parks and both HLF and DEFRA's Countryside Stewardship schemes have funded the restoration of several public and trust-owned Brown landscapes.

Wimbledon Park (London, II*) is a rare Brown urban park which faces conflicting demands from sports, leisure, nature conservation and heritage; it is under pressure from intensive uses as well as development in its setting. The park is on Historic England's Heritage at Risk Register and illustrates many of the pressures facing sites with divided ownership and lacking co-ordinated management.



Above and below: Trentham (Staffordshire, II) (Sarah Rutherford)*

Despite splendid formal gardens, the Victorian house is in ruins and the park is home to myriad recreational facilities including Trentham Monkey Forest, Shopping Village, Garden Centre, Aerial Extreme, a golf course, hotel and extensive parking. There have been over 40 planning applications since 2003.



Development and the planning system

It cannot be said too many times: Brown's parks have sustained serious damage and many remain in great danger of still further damage. Some of his designs are all but destroyed and many are at serious risk of major damage. The purpose of planning is to 'help achieve sustainable development' but too often there is little evidence of Brown's landscapes being protected.

Economic pressure

While a Brown-designed park may be a selling point, this does not mean that it protects the landscape - it can also perversely be used as a marketing tool to justify commercial development, or to site enabling development within the park (see examples opposite).

Increasing economic pressure drives many developments – the value of a landscape park is often now based on its development value, rather than traditional agricultural value of Brown's day. The perception is that it can no longer sustain itself without changes in use. A new purchaser may buy a park with a major 'conservation deficit' (ie serious dilapidation) without the means to remedy it, and needs to find ways to fund a backlog of repairs to buildings: Brown's landscape often loses out to the more heavily protected historic buildings, hosting 'enabling' development to fund their repair. Various forms of irreversible development in Brown landscapes have been seen as acceptable to fund conservation works to important buildings at the expense of the landscape.

Incremental development – insidious damage

The cumulative impact of many successive developments in a Brown park is a huge threat: significantly damaging yet hard to assess. Their large size means that many parks are constantly the target of planning applications, especially those in multiple ownership and high-pressure development areas. The result of a steady trickle of what may appear relatively minor changes is creeping, insidiously growing to a point where it causes major irreversible damage to the fabric and design, including views and setting.

No-one monitors this incremental change and its effect, damaging or otherwise, across the whole Brown site nor in the wider setting.



Syon Park hotel and Lion Gate (Sarah Rutherford)



Enabling Development

At Syon Park (London, I) a new hotel (above left) complete with Capability Restaurant, was built in the park as enabling development to fund the restoration of historic buildings; it was opened in 2011. This was followed by an application in 2016 on nearby allotments for eight blocks of three- and four-storey buildings to create 119 flats and eight houses with car parking and moving the allotments to a site inside the Lion Gate (above right). The Gardens Trust made a representation at the planning committee and permission was refused in 2017.

The Gardens Trust commented:

Whilst sympathetic to the need of the Syon estate to raise funds towards the considerable cost of running the Syon Park estate by developing the existing allotment plots for residential use, the same rationale was given as a reason to build the hotel within the park which was also intended to provide income. We would concur with our colleagues in Historic England that further information is required to justify the necessity of this scheme.

The decision notice stated: It is considered that, due to the inappropriate position and design, the proposal would result in an incongruous addition to Syon Park which would fail to preserve or enhance both the setting and the special architectural and historic character of the Grade I Listed Syon House and the Grade I Registered Park and Garden ... and it is considered that, due to the extent of development already in situ which contributes towards the restoration and maintenance of the heritage asset, the proposal is not appropriate enabling development to secure the future of the heritage asset'.



Fairway in main vista near the house at Moor Park (Hertfordshire, II). The great extent of the golf course and associated non-Brown planting and parking are shown on the cover photograph. In 2017 there was an application for yet more parking. (Kate Harwood)*



Wimbledon Park (London, II) is in divided ownership with no agreed site wide masterplan to protect the heritage. It has become dominated by sports facilities and is under constant pressure. The athletics track and poplars obscure the lake. It is on the Historic England Heritage at Risk Register. (J&L Gibbons)*

North Stoneham Park: large scale housing in an unregistered park in Hampshire

In early 2016 62 hectares in the north of the park, known as Avenue Park, were given outline permission for 1100 new dwellings, accommodation for the elderly, including a care home and assisted and independent living units, a school, community, leisure and sporting facilities and 'landscaped public spaces'. The scheme received unanimous backing by Eastleigh Borough Councillors and was included in the Local Plan. It was hard to find reference to the Brown designed park on the developer's website. The west of the park is a golf course, there are several recreation and sports facilities and it is ringed by the M3 and M27. Brown's design is unlikely to survive this scale of change.

The most common types of application

Hotel, sport and leisure development

Hotel use in extensive grounds appears appropriate. However, while promoting the beautiful Brown setting to customers, the ancillary facilities, such as a spa, large scale parking and access, golf and sports facilities, conference facilities and staff accommodation add up to major adverse effects. Completely new hotels have been built in Brown's parks to fund work on the historic house. Does the benefit of conserving and repairing the buildings outweigh the damage to Brown's unity of design?

Golf courses were in the 1980s-2000s the must-have facility, about which the Garden History Society and others campaigned in the 1990s. Fairways, bunkers and planting, club houses and parking did serious damage to Brown's concept. Luton Hoo, a Grade II*

Brown masterpiece, is a case where even the relatively sensitive hotel and golf course conversion damaged the unity of Brown's design. The threat of golf has receded: economy and lifestyle changes have seen a decline in golf club members since 2004; clubs are struggling, some are closing. But what happens if they are abandoned? Will anyone remove the golfing landscape and reinstate the Brown park design in such a costly exercise?

Tourist infrastructure and events

Temporary events seem an easy financial win for owners as they struggle to keep Brown's parks afloat. However, the indirect cost comes from the effect of large numbers of visitors, cars, coaches and catering, causing long-term damage to the fabric and aesthetics of the 'soft' landscape ranging from compaction and damage to trees and archaeology to near-permanent marquees: not all the damage is reversible.



Marquee and the aftermath of the first RHS Flower Show at Chatsworth; the shows are set to run for ten years. (Sarah Couch)

Houses, houses everywhere

Relentless housing applications of all scales have threatened Brown's parks, which are regarded as attractive and lucrative greenfield sites, especially with the current intense pressure to provide large scale housing.

Building subdivision may lead to private gardens changing the Brownian character as at Croome Court (Worcestershire, I) where the stables and yard are in private use with, private gardens.

Left: Sandleford Priory (Berkshire, II) has seen several major phases of housing and associated developments over the last 15 years, despite being a Grade II park. A further phase in 2017 proposes a new school, more houses, mobile homes and commercial development. The site is on Historic England's Heritage at Risk Register and is in multiple ownership.

*Earlier phases: 2002: 150 houses; 2015: 2000 homes, 80 bed extra care housing, 2350 sq m commercial floorspace, two primary schools, a country park, walking and cycling infrastructure.
(© Historic England Archive 29697-021)*



Some of the vital features of a Brown landscape, such as its views, disposition of planting and grazed pasture, as well as setting, may not be covered by development control



Arable fields on former parkland at Beechwood (Hertfordshire, unregistered). Changing land use can have a major impact on a park's character. (Kate Harwood)

Brown's dams

Work at Blenheim

One of Brown's largest, the lake holds 570,000m³ of water. Upgrading and strengthening works were required under the Reservoirs Act to allow the dam to withstand a 1 in 10,000 year weather event and to stop a number of significant leaks. Leaks in the core were repaired by digging a trench along the top and filling it with bentonite. To withstand the flood event the downstream face of the dam was stripped and reinforced with 6000m² of interlocking concrete blocks. The works were carried out in 2009.

Right: unsightly engineering at Ashburnham Place (Sussex, 11*).
Below: The repaired and bare Blenheim dam (Oxfordshire, 1)
(Steffie Shields)



Changes outside the planning system

The layout and landscaping of a park are not fully covered by designations and controls. Small buildings, fences, hedges, ad hoc and inappropriate planting, hardstanding, lighting and paving surfaces and agricultural changes are often permitted development outside planning control. Intrusive noise both on site and beyond, such as increased traffic, can undermine a site's character and natural qualities. There is no protection against loss from natural causes, such as loss of historic or ancient trees to age or disease or lack of management. Simple neglect or apparently minor changes in management cause great damage to Brown's designs. These include changing grazed pasture to arable, over-use of fertiliser and pesticides, over-grazing, re-wilding, not re-planting trees, lakes silting up, banks becoming overgrown and gradual obscuring of the historic design, particularly designed views.



Brown's park trees are under threat from age, neglect, climate change and disease

Above: Ickworth (Suffolk, II); oaks in the North Park are affected by Acute Oak Decline. (Sarah Rutherford)*

Brown often retained ancient oaks, as seen at Gatton Park (Surrey, II). At Gatton and Clandon there are prominent Brown period horse chestnuts, which are facing disease threats.

Below: Lone horse chestnut in the park at Clandon (Surrey, II) (Sarah Couch)



Sustainability risks

Renewable energy installations: a risk or an opportunity?

Renewable energy developments are a recent threat. Brown parks have been threatened visually within and beyond the boundaries by large scale energy installations including a wind turbine at Knowsley (Lancashire, II); a solar park at Mamhead (Devon, II*) and a wind farm at Byram (Yorkshire, unregistered). Yet landscape parks have generated energy in the past and can be a beneficial part of energy production using sun, water, wind and biomass. Many Brown parks are built around natural resources of watercourses and woodland and can also provide important flood alleviation and climate mitigation with sensitive design, management and guidance from a CMP.

Climate change and trees

Some of Brown's favourite park trees are under threat. For instance horse chestnuts are subject to Bleeding Canker and Leaf Miner Moth leading to major losses particularly in urban areas. Surviving trees are ageing and there is a need for succession planning. We need to be vigilant and in time may also consider new, more resilient species that can achieve the desired effect.

Regulations: Brown lakes under threat

Brown's genius included his unique combination of design and engineering skills in creating vast lakes. To reduce flood risk downstream the Reservoirs Act 1975 very reasonably requires regular monitoring, yet remedial works can lead to disproportionately disfiguring engineering works, with his planting replaced by bare spillways. Where engineers can be guided in the aesthetics, the appearance may be mitigated, though usually the subtle lines and the planted setting are compromised to a great degree.

Lakes are also at risk from pollution and siltation which gradually leads to loss and where lakes are dredged, the disposal of silt can cause problems.

Summary of Threats

In short the risks and threats described above are as follows:

Lack of knowledge and skills

- Knowledge and understanding of Brown's schemes is patchy, or not widely available, especially to owners and decision makers.
- Brown's significance has low widespread recognition even in England, the focus of his work.
- Many sites do not have a CMP or masterplan.
- Expert advisors in statutory authorities are scarce and becoming still scarcer.
- Reduction in local authority budgets is reducing support for Historic Environment Records which have a key role in the planning process.
- The local knowledge of Brown is often concentrated in a few committed experts and not widely disseminated.
- Trained amenity society volunteers are over-stretched coping with advising planning authorities on the flood of planning applications in Brown sites, as well as others.

Limited protection

- High volume of major planning applications is leading to the irreversible loss of integrity of Brown's designs.
- Cumulatively, a steady run of successive lesser applications often causes major damage which is not recognized or understood. It is time-consuming to track planning applications and understand their implications for Brown's work.
- Absence of a local authority development plan is a major risk to a Brown landscape as developers exploit opportunities.
- Non-designated landscapes are vulnerable to lack of consideration by decision makers.
- Key aspects of Brown's designs are often not recognised by planning authorities, especially the role of trees, agricultural management, views and setting, despite guidance.

Ownership, use, management and character changes

- Ownership changes and subdivision can lead to major damaging change.
- Agricultural management changes from pasture to arable with threats to park trees, intensification or neglect.
- Land and building subdivision and other change of use may lead to private gardens changing the Brownian character.
- Changes to access and parking with loss of Brown's drives and overambitious increases in visitor numbers may damage the Brown character and fabric to the point where it is irreversible.
- Modern landscape uses, even 'green' uses such as allotments or golf, will damage Brown's landscape character, views and pattern of park management and trees.
- Uncertainties about the future of golf courses and lost opportunities to restore Brown designs.
- Long term neglect of lakes and water courses, siltation, vegetation and loss of visual connections and pressures to recreate habitats (Water Framework Directive).
- Remodelling dams to comply with the Reservoirs Act; safety measures may cause major physical and aesthetic damage.
- Old age catches up with Brown's parkland trees; many have already been lost or are in old age.
- New tree diseases and climate change threaten planting and water courses.

Funding squeezed

- Grant aid and advice have dwindled due to political and economic factors.
- The future of agri-environment funding after Brexit is uncertain; currently there is less Countryside Stewardship funding for historic parkland than previous schemes and HLF funding is not appropriate to all sites.
- Major, apparently beneficial, capital projects can result in damaging change if not very carefully considered.

The protection and conservation of Brown's legacy depends on a range of different organisations and agencies, from the County Gardens Trust researcher in the Record Office to the local authority planner, from the estate manager to Historic England advisers and beyond. In a time of limited, over-stretched and ever dwindling resources, it is imperative that we add value to our work by co-operating and supporting each other. This needs to be a network, connected and sharing information and ideas: all too often, the lack of resources results in those links being broken. The following recommendations are based on our review of the current situation and the risks we have identified, and are intended to support all those different bodies in safeguarding Brown's legacy. They are for all those bodies to consider.

Knowledge and skills

We need to:

- Continue detailed research into Brown landscapes and buildings, especially those which are not included on the National Heritage List for England.
- Consider sites and built features for local and national listing, drawing especially on local knowledge, and expertise from specialist organisations and groups.
- Share and advance knowledge by contributing to Historic Environment Records, the Parks & Gardens UK database, and national initiatives, e.g. Historic England's Enriching the List project.
- Feed information gathered at a local level into national and local Heritage at Risk registers.
- Take every opportunity to flag up the importance of locally and nationally listed historic landscapes.
- Support and develop training for volunteers and professionals in understanding Brown landscapes and the English Landscape Style.

Protection

We need to:

- Ensure there are robust policies for development control in nationally and locally listed historic landscapes, including Brown's.
- Ensure that local authority consultation with the national agencies and with the Gardens Trust is carried out in accordance with statutory requirements.
- Continue to develop links between us all to support casework: communication and support are essential to effective conservation.
- Insist on Statements of Significance in planning applications as required by the National Planning Policy Framework.

- Ensure robust Local Plan policies for the protection and enhancement of locally and nationally listed historic landscapes.
- Consider Conservation Area designation to protect Brown landscapes as well as other historic parks and gardens.
- Ensure rigour in assessing enabling development proposals: such proposals rarely benefit the Brown landscape.
- Encourage coordinated management where landscapes are in divided ownership.
- Raise awareness of potential harm being caused by permitted development.

Ownership, use, management and character

We need to:

- Engage with managers and new owners of Brown sites to offer expert advice and information about the special qualities of such landscapes.
- Press for CMPs, masterplans and Statements of Significance to address Brown's designs in their entirety, irrespective of ownership.
- Monitor and understand the impacts on historic landscapes of changes in traditional estate management practices, e.g. changes in farming and forestry, the growth in visitor attraction businesses, or diversification of business operations, including change of use in buildings and areas, access and parking.
- Advise owners on managing and altering Brown sites, including funding sources and fiscal incentives e.g. agri-environment schemes, Lottery funding, conditional exemption for Inheritance Tax.

Campaigning

We need to:

- Continue the legacy of 2016's Capability Brown Festival and promote Brown landscapes whenever possible and to the widest audience – his landscapes are a national treasure and everyone should be able to appreciate and enjoy them.
- Understand the reach of social media to support conservation campaigns and raise awareness of threats to historic parks and gardens.
- Develop links: between conservation organisations, and with decision-makers at every level.
- Get the English Landscape Style recognised in the World Heritage Site list.
- Stay vigilant!

Further reading

The Gardens Trust publications

The [Planning System in England](#) and the Protection of Historic Parks and Gardens Guidance for Local Planning Authorities

[Planning Conservation Advice Notes \(PCANs\)](#)

Management Plans
[PCAN 14: Management Plans](#)

Historic England

Capability Brown [Aerial Photographs](#)

Research Report Series [No. 50-2013](#) Lancelot Capability Brown: A Research Impact Review Prepared by the University of East Anglia Landscape Group, Jon Gregory, Sarah Spooner, Tom Williamson

[Conservation Area](#) Designation, Appraisal and Management

[Local Heritage Lists](#)

Good Practice Advice in Planning Note 3: [The Setting of Heritage Assets](#)

[National Heritage List for England](#)

Suggestions for [listing and registration](#)

[Enriching the List](#)

Funding

Environmental land management funding - [Countryside Stewardship Scheme](#)

[Heritage Lottery Fund](#) grants

[Conditional exemption](#) from Inheritance Tax/Capital Gains Tax

Capability Brown Festival

[Interactive Map](#) and information about sites where Capability Brown is known or thought to have worked across the UK

[Biodiversity](#)

List of Brown Sites

[A list of landscapes](#) that have been attributed to 'Capability' Brown, John Phibbs with Steffie Shields, third edition, November 2015

Ancient and Veteran Tree Advice

[Ancient Tree Forum](#)

Planning documents

[National Planning Policy Framework \(NPPF\)](#)

[Permitted Development Rights](#) For Agriculture and Forestry

[Advice on Outbuildings](#)



The derelict temple in the public park at Temple Newsam (Yorkshire, II) (Sarah Rutherford)

Rear cover image: aerial photograph of Aynhoe Park (Northamptonshire, Grade II)

*Development is proposed in the foreground and large swathes of parkland have been converted to arable with the loss of many important trees
(© Historic England Archive 29871-021)*



An aerial photograph showing a small village nestled between large green fields and a large brown plowed field. The village has many houses and trees. A road runs through the village. The foreground is dominated by a large green field with some trees.

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