Brown’s Appuldurcombe in Context

Brown was paid £52.10.0 (50 guineas) in 1779 for work at Appuldurcombe. What did that amount purchase? Brown usually visited a site and charged for the visit and survey, if required, by John Spyers or Samuel Lapidge. More was charged if a plan was produced, further visits from Brown made and the work itself was done. Some clients appear to have paid for very little, but as the accounts are incomplete and many transactions were cash in hand, it is difficult to be certain. However, a survey by Lapidge and 3 visits by Brown to Baron Tracey Putney Heath cost £26.5.0 (21 guineas); a survey by Spyers of the 286 acres at Kings Weston cost £21.0.0(20 guineas)[[1]](#footnote-1); and the plan for alterations about the house and terras (not the area covered by the Spyers plan) and 3visits from Brown cost £63.0.0 (60 guineas)

For Appuldurcombe we are told that Sir Richard Worsley was billed for *a journey there in 1779 and a plan for the alteration of the place.*  The 50 gns would certainly cover the journey, plan and some work. It does appear that the plan was executed largely as Brown envisaged[[2]](#footnote-2).

But what else was Brown doing at that time? It’s difficult to know precisely where he was as payments could be delayed by several years before they appear in any account. He was at Hallingbury in Essex from 1772 – the invoice of 100gns was settled in 1778 - which covered a survey by Spyers (of 493 acres, 3 roods and 6 perches), a general plan and plans for 2 lodges[[3]](#footnote-3).

He was also in Yorkshire at that time. Sir Christopher Sykes had called him in at Sledmere in1777-78, after spending £8.600 on planting trees. Richard Beaumont at Whitely Beaumont paid £50gns for a journey by Brown in 1779 and a plan for general alterations and the Earl of Scarborough consulted Brown 1760-79 on Sandbeck Park and Roche Abbey. Brown’s work making the environs of the abbey more picturesque did not last long. The mid-19th century interest in antiquarianism meant that excavations soon destroyed Brown’s work[[4]](#footnote-4).

But how was work on the grand scale, as desired by owners and executed by Brown possible? There are several reasons. Since the Glorious Revolution of 1688 there had been greater stability due to the curbing of Crown power, leading to a greater willingness of landowners to invest in their properties.

This included consolidation of estates through selective purchase and disposal of outlying parcels of land, smaller estates amalgamated, and the rise in enclosures and road diversion orders. Legal changes had meant that a rise in strict settlements and entails kept estates intact to hand on to the next generation (however heavily mortgaged).

The wherewithal to pay for all this came about because the tax emphasis had changed to customs and excise, i.e. consumption rather than land. This spread the overall tax burden on to a much wider – and poorer – section of the population. There had been an enormous increase in trade and empire with profits made by those who had money to invest and many owners were members of these trading companies like the East India Company. The development of banking systems with bankers drafts made the actual payment much easier as it was a form of credit whereby a draft could be passed on several times, in lieu of cash. The old system of patronage, especially royal patronage was still alive and kicking with many sinecures. Brown himself was the recipient of royal patronage. The £500 per quarter retainer he received as the King’s gardener would have helped his cash-flow enabling his large business to flourish. There were other talented ‘improvers’ working at the same time; was part of Brown’s pre-eminence due to fewer money problems?

And costs were falling. There was a rise in the population in the 1740s which led to depression of agricultural wages and rises of agricultural prices and rent. All good news for the wealthy as they could now buy up the struggling middlemen who often reverted to paid workers. (the poor were still poor – just more so).

Certainly vast amount s were spent on landscape improvement; it has been suggested[[5]](#footnote-5) that the total amount invested it was the equivalent in national economic terms to naval spending or canal mania. The biggest spender appears to have been the Duke of Marlborough with the equivalent of £55 million spent at Blenheim and Langley

The idea of landscape as beautiful and profitable and ‘natural’ was certainly not a new concept in Brown’s time. We can trace this back to the 17th century during the interregnum when the circle round Samuel Hartlib (1600-1662) were interested in the new science in technical instruments, education, medicine, chemistry/alchemy, natural philosophy, husbandry, agriculture and gardening. The desire to advance empirically gained knowledge, the promotion of trade and commerce for the benefit of all was informed by their evangelical piety and millenarianism. Hartlib was delighted by Invisible College proposals which eventually turned into the Royal Society (some of the circle such as Evelyn and Henry Oldenburg helped found it in 1660).

Hartlib commented that the Art of Gardening *is of but a few years standing* in England and therefore not deeply rooted, nor well understood. *Ingenuities* only came in about 50 years ago (c.1600); this does not mean automata as introduced by de Caus but cauliflowers!

He made 4 assumptions:

1. Gardens are culmination of human interventions in the natural world
2. Hierarchy of space – intervention decreases with distance from house
3. It is not always possible to see this but it must be pointed enough for those who grasped its underlying principles
4. Ultimate significance of garden hierarchies is to appreciate God’s handiwork in the large world of nature

One of the most active of the circle was the Rev. John Beale (1608-82/3) of Priors Court, Backbury in Herefordshire who wrote extensively on fruit trees, later ‘borrowed’ by John Evelyn for his work *Pomona, . . ..* This was always intended as an appendix to Sylva and was never printed separately. Beale himself wrote *Herefordshire orchards, a pattern for all England* in 1657. Together with Hartlib he promoted a book in 1659 on plantations, orchards etc for *food, fuell and timber*. He drafted 2 synopses of books on gardening, one on compost and one on gardens of pleasure in 1659. He also proposed Antique gardening as he envisaged that the earliest gardens were of God’s making and required Man to consider God’s works. He advocated the pleasures in the garden be drawn not from Art or garden enclosures but in natural features and rural scenes.

He considered modern (formal) gardens such as Greenwich, Woodstock and Windsor to be puppet plays. A garden should have a *reall* and lofty hill, a neighbouring river, parks, lawns, fair vales, fair boscage or forest [*Viridaria, Walkes,* mound, greensward, groves and Prospects with the *flowry area but the trimmings*]. He thought it ruined God’s work to raise up and lower hills to provide terracing etc. He often quoted *de Re Rustica[[6]](#footnote-6)* and the Third Nature. The idea of a Third Nature derives from Cicero and was expounded by Italian humanists (where the first two natures are Wilderness and Art and the Third Nature is Gardens).

Agriculture and gardening were seen as part of a continuum. Cressy Dimmock put in plans for ideal farms (cross between Switzer and Ebenezer Howard)

John Evelyn was on friendly terms with Hartlib and this circle of puritan intellectuals. Both Hartlib and Beale were anxious, as were the Oxford Dons, for Evelyn to publish *Elysium Britannicum* though *Elysium* was considered a bit pagan! In *Elysium Britannicum*  Evelyn set out his thoughts on art and nature in landscape. These seem to have been drawn from his correspondence with Revd. John Beale and to reflect Beale’s views. Beale’s idea was to *apply to it* [the plot] *the best shape that will agree with the nature of the place[[7]](#footnote-7).*

*At no hand therefore let our Workman [enforce] his plot to any particular phantasy, but, contrive rather how to apply to it the best shape that will agree with the nature of the place.*

Evelyn then set out as an example *no phantasticall Utopia, but a real place* as an example. He did note (then delete) that it was called Backbury. This description accords with Backbury Hill in Herefordshire, well known to Beale.

Evelyn’s ‘real’ Elysium, closely based on Beale’s Backbury, had a variety of walks which ascended a high hill, some of which were sunken and sheltered, a square lawn *which is the perfect resemblance of an antient Flower-Garden* bounded by an oak thicket, a precipice suitable for *Solitary Grotts and Caverns* and then to the ‘Vale of Misery with *poore Cottage…woods .. rocks… caves..mountains and stupendous solitudes fitting to dispose the beholder to pious ectasies, silent and profound contemplation, t*he mansion is at the foot of the hill on the other side from the Vale of Misery, between this house and the river there are Viridiana – plantations of trees, pleasure gardens and orchards leading to views across the river of rich vales

The ideas of informal beauty and utility were brought to the fore again in the early 18th century with the ideas of Augustan landscape promoted by writers Shaftesbury (Anthony Ashley Cooper 1st Earl), who wrote *Characteristicks of Men, Manners, Opinions and Times[[8]](#footnote-8)*. Joseph Addison *The Pleasures of the Imagination* – a series of essays (no. 414 is key)[[9]](#footnote-9) and Alexander Pope whose *Moral Essays[[10]](#footnote-10)* and his satires of formal gardens as well as his wide circle of gardening friends made him very influential.

Addison’s comment *Why may not a whole estate be thrown into a kind of garden by frequent plantations, that may turn as much to the profit as the pleasure of the owner? A marsh overgrown with willows, or a mountain shaded with oaks, are not only more beautiful, but more beneficial, than when they lie bare and unadorned. Fields of corn make a pleasant prospect, and if the walks were a little taken care of that lie between them, if the natural embroidery of the meadows were helped and improved by some small additions of art, and the several rows of hedges set off by trees and flowers that the soil was capable of receiving, a man might make a pretty landscape of his own possessions[[11]](#footnote-11)*. was translated into designs by Stephen Switzer in the fictitious Paston Manor in *Ichnographia Rustica[[12]](#footnote-12).* And the idea of the classical style of retreat gained further impetus from Robert Castell’s *Villas of the Ancients[[13]](#footnote-13)*.

William Kent was the first practitioner of the new Augustan style which he developed through his career, with Rousham as the most complete of his compositions still extant. William Kent, although credited by Horace Walpole with having leapt *the fence and saw that all nature was a garden*[[14]](#footnote-14) was continuing and developing the idea of the landscape as art **and** nature*.* At Rousham *Kent tried to create an Elysium (a classical paradise following Claude), Southcote's ambition was an Arcady; the ideal countryside*. His landscapes show many features later to be seen in those of Brown and his ilk: clumps of trees dotting the parkland[[15]](#footnote-15), informal layout of trees rather than avenues and so on.

However, the idea of some move away from the tyranny of rule and line had already been undertaken by Charles Bridgeman towards the end of his career with the remarkably naturalistic landscape at Brocket Park and his s-shaped canal at Sherborne Castle. Was this inspired by the idea of sharawdagi? Our ambassador Sir Henry Wotton (1568-1639) (famous for the definition of "An ambassador is an honest gentleman sent to lie abroad for the good of his country.”[[16]](#footnote-16)) had written about sharawdagi[[17]](#footnote-17) This was taken up by Sir William Temple of Moor Park (Surrey) *Among us, the beauty of building and planting is placed chiefly in some certain proportions, symmetries, or uniformities; our walks and our trees ranged so as to answer one another, and at exact distances. The Chineses scorn this way of planting, and say, a boy, that can tell an hundred, may plant walks of trees in straight lines, and over-against one another, and to what length and extent he pleases. But their greatest reach of imagination is employed in contriving figures, where the beauty shall be great, and strike the eye, but without any order or disposition of parts that shall be commonly or easily observed: and, though we have hardly any notion of this sort of beauty, yet they have a particular word to express it, and, where they find it hit their eye at first sight, they say the sharawadgi is fine or is admirable, or any such expression of esteem*.[[18]](#footnote-18)

This he interpreted as a wiggle so that there were always new vistas and objects to be seen round the corner as one walked through the landscape, and he put in one of the first wiggly walks in his island woods at Moor Park.

Other owners appear to have ‘de-formalised’ their landscape before the main era of the Improvers. One intriguing example is Wentworth Castle in Yorkshire executed in the late 1720s and 30s. No named designer name is credited with this and earlier attributions to Brown have been discounted. Similarly the views by Anthony Devis appear to show an English Landscape garden at Appuldurcombe before Brown is known to have worked there. Was this Sir Richard ‘doing his own thing’, or using another Improver or was Brown there earlier?

One way of utilising your land, especially if limited in acreage (at least for the early examples) was the ferme ornée combining the virtues of the productive farm with those of the Landscape Garden. Switzer picked up the idea in *Ichnographia Rustica* and it seems to have been he who popularised the phrase: *This Taste, so truly useful and delightful as it is, has also for some time been the Practice of some of the best Genius's of France under the Title of* La Ferme Ornée.

However, it was William Shenstone at The Leasowes and Philip Southcote at Woburn Farm, along with others at Sugnall, Richings etc who perfected it. Shenstone was a poet and his ferme ornée is literary, associationist and commemorative (urns, seats, inscriptions to many of his friends, usually after their deaths). A much later poet Ian Finlay Hamilton in Little Sparta consciously set out parts of his garden as homage to Shenstone.

Joseph Spence states in 1734 that 'Mr Southcote was the first that brought in the garden farm, or ferme ornée'. He purchased Woburn which had 116 acres using his wife’s (The Dowager Duchess of Cleveland) dowry. After starting off in a formal manner Southcote soon moved to treating the boundaries and slopes in a more painterly manner - including hiding any fences with vegetation.

*The brighter evergreens, which are the shades in summer are the lights of winter. How much worse urns look if they have no foliage to back them. When the whole garden plan is visible at one glance of the eye, it takes away even the hope of variety.*

There were several buildings around the circuit route but the key attribute of the ferme ornée as illustrated by Spence from Woburn Farm, was the flowery walks between the fields, wide enough for a comfortable path backed on one side by theatrical planting with many flowers and scents as well as trees and shrubs. The views through the shrubbery to the fields were carefully managed with eyecatchers and incidents – some borrowed from neighbours (Shenstone famously cut down a few trees to open up a view to Hagley’s new ‘ruined castle’). Brown himself is thought to have designed Fitzroy Farm as a ferme ornée on Hampstead Heath for the Earl of Southampton. *The Ambulator* published in 1776, refers to Fitzroy Farm, stating ‘the grounds are kept in the highest cultivation of the *ferme ornée*’. London Parks and Gardens Trust are researching into the Brown attribution for this site

At the time Brown was starting on his independent career, two influential books were published.

William Hogarth’s *The Analysis of Beauty (Written with a view of fixing the fluctuating IDEAS of T A S T E*.)[[19]](#footnote-19) is centrally concerned with demonstrating the sources of beauty, why objects are beautiful. Taste, the sense for what is fitting, harmonious, or beautiful, is essentially the recognition of beauty, and Hogarth’s subtitle, reflects his irritation with conflicting ideas about beauty and the hard-to-understand pronouncements of artistic or aesthetic excellence. The work defines 6 crucial aspects:

“Of Fitness” (or decorum);“Of Variety” (composed for uncomposed variety leads to chaos and deformity);“Of Uniformity, Regularity, or Symmetry” (Sameness and strict regularity are to be avoided and modified by turnings, contrasts, and motion); “Of simplicity, or Distinctness.” (Similarly, simplicity requires variety to please. But simplicity gives beauty to variety.); “Of Intricacy.” (this relates to the engagement of the viewer by the object or work). This category brings Hogarth to his central theme: “the waving and serpentine lines”, and to the consideration of forms “at rest” and “in motion”. “Intricacy” is also a “composed intricacy of form”.

“Of Quantity.” Hogarth admires magnitude, ample size (“vastness”, “horror”, “awe”, “immense”, “colossal”, “grandeur”. “Quantity adds greatness to grace”) The reconciliation with other criteria leads to the avoidance of excess.

The other publication was Edmund Burke’s *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful[[20]](#footnote-20).* This was the first complete philosophical exposition for separating the beautiful and the sublime into their own respective rational categories. Burke's view of beauty is that it cannot be understood by the traditional bases of beauty: proportion, fitness, or perfection but is far more complex.

Diderot[[21]](#footnote-21) and Emmanuel Kant[[22]](#footnote-22) both refer to it andKant states that feelings of enjoyment are subjective. These are, of course the finer feelings, which require some sensitivity, intellectual excellence, talent, or virtue and are of two kinds the feeling of the sublime and the feeling of the beautiful.. Beautiful examples are the sight of flower beds, grazing flocks, and daylight. sublime feelings are the result of seeing mountain peaks, raging storms, and night. These are further subdivided and examined but are exactly what those of sensibility of the latter part of the 18th century would have recognised, when emotion, rather than reason, was the driver to appreciating landscape.

A quotation from Burke to explain the sensation of beauty *Most people must have observed the sort of sense they have had on being swiftly drawn in an easy coach on a smooth turf, with gradual ascents and declivities. This will give a better idea of the beautiful, and point out its probable course better, than almost anything else,*  demonstrates the experience of driving or riding round a landscape park and the importance of the drives and rides. That this was now a delight rather than a penance was due to great strides in the technology of coach –building with better steering systems and the introduction of C springs, and the development of lighter carriages. It was also due to the improvement in the quality of the roads with Turnpike Trusts from 1707 going along way towards making road travel more comfortable (and incidentally, helping the domestic touring fashion)

Path systems within pleasure grounds were also laid out with either grass or gravel according to soil type and usage. Although women were considered best suited to ‘passive exercise’ (sitting in a carriage as they were not strong enough to walk), a gentle turn about the garden was not beyond them. Paths at Madingley Hall in Cambridge replicated the original Brown ones

As well as travelling around the landscapes on land, there was also the opportunity to view it from the lake, broadwater or river and many illustrations of these landscapes show boats on the water, either for fishing, for sailing, for practising ship’s rigging (Southill Park) or mock naval engagements (Wotton Underwood). Brown used the approach, with its views and concealments to excellent effect to achieve the criteria advocated by Hogarth, not least in the placing of bridges to give the approaching visitor an oblique view of the house

Landscapes are for use, not just for leisure but also agriculture and sport. The development of shooting game birds was greatly helped by improvements in gun technology. Whereas early hunters had to wait until a bird obligingly sat on a low branch to pot it, the development of the double-barrel gun in France in the 1730s and the rifling of barrels to give greater accuracy meant that more fun could be had by shooting at flying birds. And to get them to fly up, clumps of trees needed to be carefully positioned to force them to do so[[23]](#footnote-23). Deer had more or less been banished from these parks by the 1740s so less omnivorous animals such as sheep and cattle could be introduced and ornamental trees and shrubs stood a better chance of survival.

The idea of marine villas became more popular towards the end of the century, the first to turn its face to the sea, rather than shunning it was at Hastings but by the turn of the 19th century, clusters of marine villas were found in the Isle of Wight, North Wales and the West Country. Brown himself designed Cadland Sea Cottage in 1775. The first Steephill Cottage was developed by Hans Stanley. Island governor 1764-67 and 1770-1780. Worsley considered it ‘admirably contrived and elegantly laid out’. Worsley's own Sea Cottage was not built/laid out until the early 1790s.

Other landscapes developed as well. Even before Brown’s death William Emes was laying out Badger Dingle in Shropshire ( c.1780) in a steep rocky gorge; a landscape type that became known as the Picturesque as advocated by Richard Payne Knight of Downton[[24]](#footnote-24) and laid out wherever the topography was suitably dramatic; Piercefield, Hackfall, Hawkstone.

Emes was one of the many other Improvers working at the time, some of whom had worked with Brown at some stage in their careers. Nathaniel Richmond who had started out with Brown at Moor Park, was now running his own design business and nursery; Richard Woods, never a Brown associate, was well known for his flower gardens; as well as some of the nurseries such as William Malcolm and Sons and a host of lesser-known characters, including those who had worked for Brown, Adam Mickle, Thomas White

Finally two points to ponder:

Firstly, was Brown a source of the destruction of his landscapes? By 1795 Richard Payne Knight was attacking the Brownian style for being boring, aided and abetted by William Chambers and Uvedale Price. Times were changing. Taste and Enlightenment ideals were giving way to sensibility and Romanticism. Reason was out and emotion was in. The idea of the gothic horror story (pioneered by Horace Walpole with Castle of Otranto[[25]](#footnote-25)) added to the move towards more dramatic, more incident-filled landscape – whether a rocky crag or a flower-filled terrace. Imagination was the thing, not now contemplation. Were Brown’s landscapes not what was wanted by the next generation? We know that today, Brown’s landscapes are not understood, and are often dismissed a any old bit of countryside just ripe for a nice crop of houses

Secondly, Britain had been involved with three World Wars over the course of Brown’s lifetime: (1739-48) Austrian Succession, (1756-63) Seven Years, (1775-83) American War of Independence. These involved not only the European powers but their American (North and South), Caribbean and Indian colonies. There had also been the two Jacobite risings of 1715 and 1745 with armies marching across England. Did the uncertainties and worries of the time cause people to find a solace in the English Landscape garden where all was right with the world?

With one Lost Paradise the name  
Of our first ancestor is stained;  
Brown shall enjoy unsullied fame  
For many a Paradise he regained[[26]](#footnote-26)

The Last Word must go to Jane Austen from *Mansfield Park* [[27]](#footnote-27)where Mr Rushworth wants to make improvements to Sotherton:

It wants improvement . . . beyond anything.  I never saw a place that wanted so much improvement in my life.

"I must try to do something with it," said Mr. Rushworth, "but I do not know what. I hope I shall have some good friend to help me." "Your best friend upon such an occasion," said Miss Bertram calmly, "would be Mr. Repton, I imagine." "That is what I was thinking of. As he has done so well by Smith, I think I had better have him at once. His terms are five guineas a day."

“‘Repton, or anybody of that sort, would certainly have the avenue at Sotherton down; the avenue that leads from the west front to the top of the hill, you know.”

Edmund Bertram:

"but, had I a place to new fashion, I should not put myself into the hands of an improver. I would rather have an inferior degree of beauty, of my own choice, and acquired progressively. I would rather abide by my own blunders than by his."

1. Brown often charged surveying work by the acreage [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Masters, P, 2005, Appuldurcombe Park Conservation Plan 2005, 32, footnote 69(for English Heritage) [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Essex Gardens Trust, 2016, *Lancelot Brown and his Essex Clients* [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Lynch, K, 2016, *Noble Prospects: Capability Brown and the Yorkshire Landscape* Yorkshire Gardens Trust [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. By Professor Sir Roderick Floud – comm. From Lindley Library [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. by Columella d.AD70 [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. C.f. Alexander Pope:  *consult the genius of the place in all* [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. 1711 (including the *Moralists* which was first written in 1705) , [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. The Spectator for 1712 [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. 4 poems published between 1731 and 1735 [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. The Spectator (1712) [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. 1741-2 developed from his 1718 *Ichnographia* [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Robert Castell *Villas of the Ancients*  1728 dedicated to Earl of Burlington [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Walpole, H *On Modern Gardening* (Written before 1770 but published in 1780) [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Kent’s clumps at Holkham were likened by Horace Walpole to a 10 of spades playing card [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Augsburg 1640 [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Henry Wotton *Elements of Architecture,* 1614 [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. Sir William Temple, Upon the Gardens of Epicurus (1684) [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. 1753 [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. 1757 [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. Encyclopédie 1751-1772 [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. *Observations of the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime*  1764 [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. *Pteryplegia* –*the art of shooting flying* 1717 which extols the trees, glades and interstices which force the birds to fly [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. *The Landscape: a didactic poem* 1795 [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. 1764 [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. Horace Walpole to William Mason on Brown’s death [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. Published 1814 [↑](#footnote-ref-27)