

Capability Brown at Temple Newsam



Temple Newsam © Temple Newsam and Leeds City Council

Lancelot 'Capability' Brown remodelled the gardens at Temple Newsam in 1765–1771 for the 9th Viscount Irwin. Brown's master plan for Temple Newsam, near Leeds, West Yorkshire, is dated 1762. He had been invited to the estate by Viscount and Lady Irwin as early as 1758, but it was not until 1760 that a payment to him of £40 (around £67,000 in 2015) was made. Some initial planning may have been done then, as work was carried out in the plantations in 1760, possibly to set up a nursery.

The design aimed to create the sort of serene landscape popularised by Claude Lorrain (1600–1682) and his patrons, whose paintings inspired the picturesque ideal and were admired by Brown. Charles Ingram, Viscount Irwin, had bought a painting by Claude in 1765 for £100 (over £171,000 in 2015). Although Brown's plan was not fully followed, his concept of a serene, picturesque landscape can still be seen.

Temple Newsam www.leeds.gov.uk/museumsandgalleries/Pages/Temple-Newsam.aspx

Particular thanks to Rachel Conroy of Leeds City Council and Karen Lynch of Yorkshire Gardens Trust.

For more information about Brown and his work go to capabilitybrown.org/research



Capability Brown

Lancelot 'Capability' Brown (1716–1783) was born in the Northumberland village of Kirkharle, and went on to popularise the English landscape style, advising on over 250 large country estates throughout England and Wales.

Formal gardens gave way to naturalistic parkland of trees, expanses of water and rolling grass. He also designed great houses, churches and garden buildings, and was skilled in engineering, especially with water.

This guide was created as part of a festival celebrating the 300th anniversary of his birth. Find out more about the man and his work at capabilitybrown.org/research

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



LOTTERY FUNDED

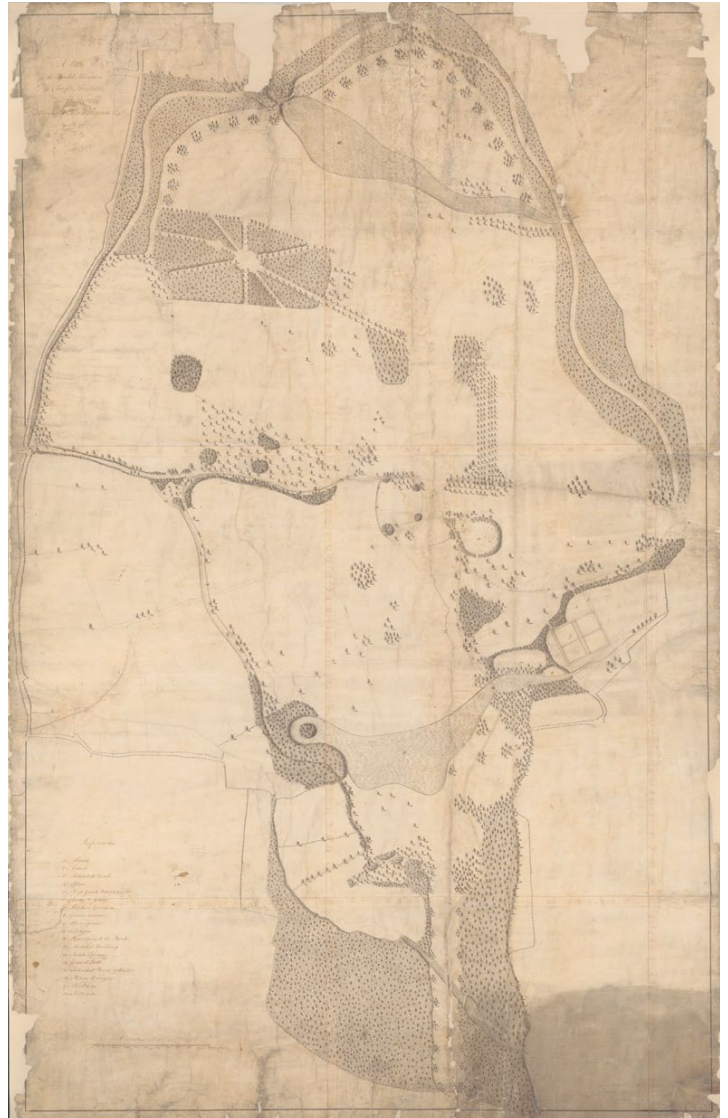
Rain delays work

Although Capability Brown produced the plan for Temple Newsam late in 1762, he still hadn't delivered it to his clients by January 1763, when Charles Ingram wrote to him: "I am glad to find by your letter that the plans are ready and I must beg of the favour of you to send them to the Temple as soon as possible... I am greatly surprised at your mentioning Frost. We are all here as warm as Toast."

When Brown's men finally began work in 1765 they were delayed by bad weather that continued into the spring, leading Lady Irwin to comment that "Mr Brown has put us in a Woful dirty Pickle". She was still able to go into the park, thanks to the addition of a gravel walk, designed for wet weather promenading.

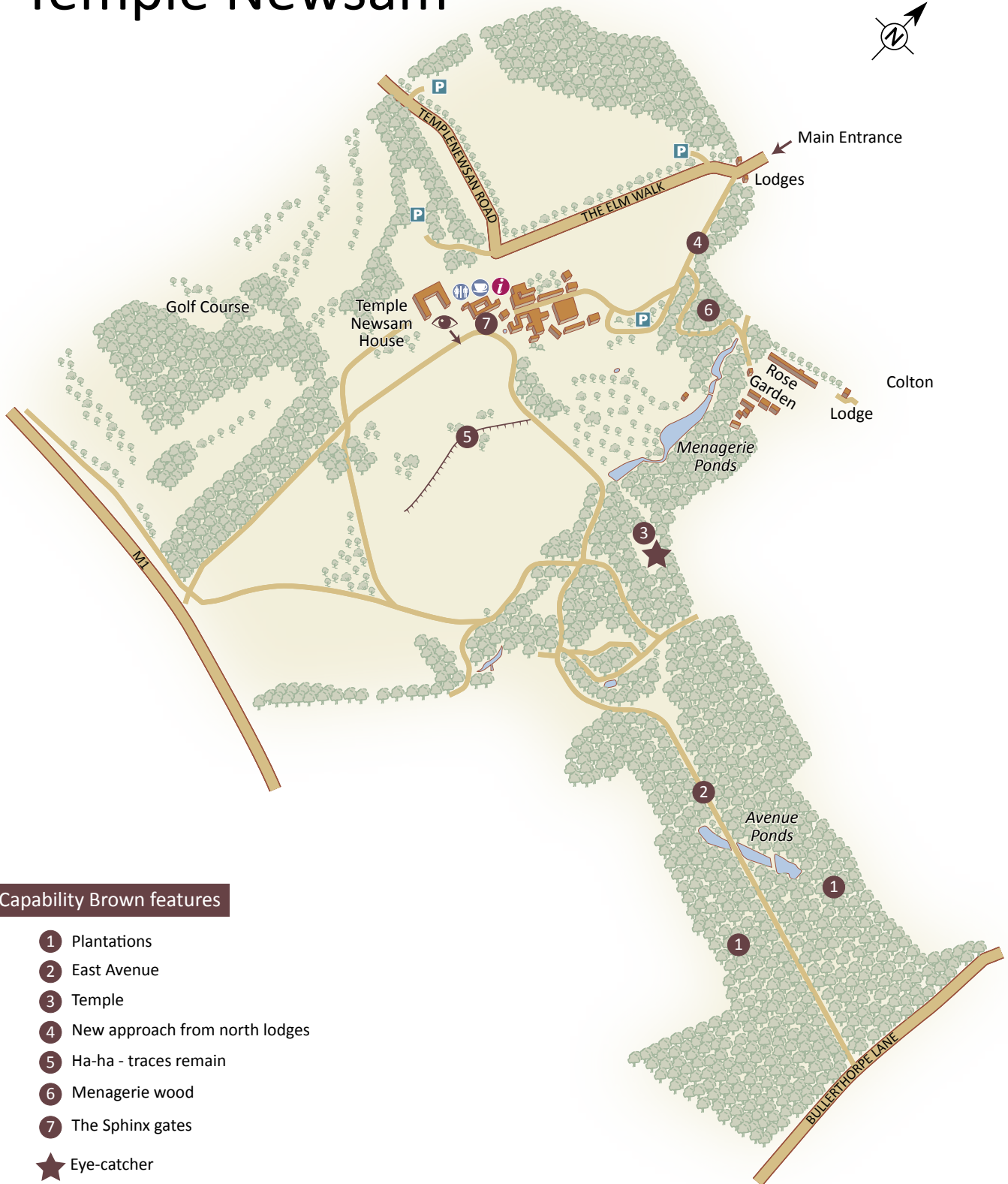
In December 1766 Frances, Lady Irwin, writes to her friend Lady Susan Stewart about looking at the Claude painting as an antidote to the winter weather: "I apply myself to my beauteous Claude where the scene always enchants me, the trees are green, the water placid & serene & the air has a warmth very comfortable."

The accounts do not show exactly what work Brown did at the estate, but comparison of his plan with later maps reveals that much of his design was completed. He remodelled an avenue to the west of the house, turning it into a plantation rather than a formal feature. The east avenue (dating to 1710) was left untouched, apart from new plantations to soften the outer edges. The extensive planting required a lot of labour. In 1766 there was a bill for ten men working for six days at 1 shilling per day, just to plant "Trees in the plantation the low side of the Park". This wage was equivalent to a salary of £22,000 today, well above current average pay for labourers which is £16,000.



Plan for the intended alterations at Temple Newsam, 1762, By kind permission of West Yorkshire Archive Service, Leeds, WYL100/EA/20/5

Capability Brown at Temple Newsam



Capability Brown features

- ① Plantations
- ② East Avenue
- ③ Temple
- ④ New approach from north lodges
- ⑤ Ha-ha - traces remain
- ⑥ Menagerie wood
- ⑦ The Sphinx gates
- ★ Eye-catcher
- ↑ Viewpoint
- ⌋ Ha-ha
- 🌳 Woodland or copse
- 🌳 Parkland trees
- 🌳 Shrubbery

- 📍 Visitor Centre
- ☕ Refreshments
- 🚻 Toilets
- P Parking

400 yards
400 metres



Stable buildings at Temple Newsam © Temple Newsam and Leeds City Council

A new approach

Brown placed a small, pedimented temple on the hill as an eye-catcher, with a clearing around it to give a view back to the house. In around 1768 he moved the approach to the house away from the north lodges, creating a more winding route and used 'curious and hardy shrubs' along the walks. He removed the stable block and riding school from view, so that the house became the main feature of the estate. The Sphinx gates below the stable block are copies of those designed by Lord Burlington for Chiswick, which haven't survived. The gates were cast in 1768, and cost £47 and 5 shillings (around £80,000 in 2015).



Sphinx gates near the stable block © Simon Warner

Other elements of Brown's design were not built. These included a design for the west front of the house and the proposed areas of water with 'sham' or dummy bridges. The existing bridge and ponds dated from earlier work by architect William Etty (1675–1734). The water is even mentioned in a 1767 poem about landscape gardening: "But when the Lake shall these sweet Grounds adorn". It is not clear whether the thatched cottage or rustic dairy were ever built.

William Stones, Brown's foreman, was still employed at Temple Newsam in January 1771. Viscount Irwin's bank records show a final payment to Brown of £570 (£800,000 in 2015) was made in September 1771.

Biodiversity at Temple Newsam

At Temple Newsam, the parkland features support a variety of habitats including wood pasture and parkland, large areas of deciduous woodland including beech trees, broadleaved woodland, mixed broadleaved woodland, coniferous woodland including yew trees, mixed coniferous woodland, and habitats associated with the large lakes and ponds. The location of the site within the urban area of Leeds means it provides an important refuge for wildlife, particularly for woodland and wetland species.

The estate today

In 1922 the Earl of Halifax sold the estate to Leeds Corporation. The park and farm is now open to the public, while the house is used as a museum and gallery.