

Capability Brown at Berrington Hall



Aerial view of Berrington Hall and its ha-ha © National Trust Images

At Berrington Hall, Capability Brown's final landscape combines sweeping pleasure grounds, an impressive lake and panoramic views of his wooded parkland and the surrounding countryside.

Brown's projects often required him to modernise an existing landscape. Berrington was a new scheme that included building a house for banker and politician Thomas Harley, who had bought the Herefordshire estate in 1775. In 1778 Henry Holland Junior, Brown's son-in-law, made an estimate for "The Several Works proposed to be done in Building a new House for the Rt. Honble. Thomas Harley". Though the design was Holland's, Brown is thought to have influenced where the building was positioned, to take full advantage of the views into his new landscape.

Samuel Lapidge carried out a survey of Berrington, and a "plan of alterations" was made, which has not survived. Brown's account book shows four payments totalling £1,600 (almost £2.3 million in 2015) for work between July 1781 and September 1782, but there is no record of earlier works in the house or grounds.

The National Trust: www.nationaltrust.org.uk/berrington-hall

Particular thanks to Ellie Jones at Berrington

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.



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The pool surrounded by trees © National Trust Images

Berrington Pool

Brown's 6.5-hectare (14-acre) lake lies to the south-west of Berrington Hall. It was formed from a tributary of the River Lugg and also fed by springs. Berrington Pool has a large wooded island and a smaller one, so that when the lake is viewed from the house it looks like the loop of a river.

To hold back the water in the lake, Brown formed a high earth dam with impressive banks. Brown built his dams with a covering blanket of clay and stones to keep out the water on the lake side.

Park and views

Berrington Hall lies in the centre of the northern area of the park and is the main eye-catcher in Brown's landscape. The columns of the portico at the front of Holland's house frame the views to the north-west, west and south-west.

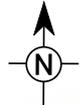
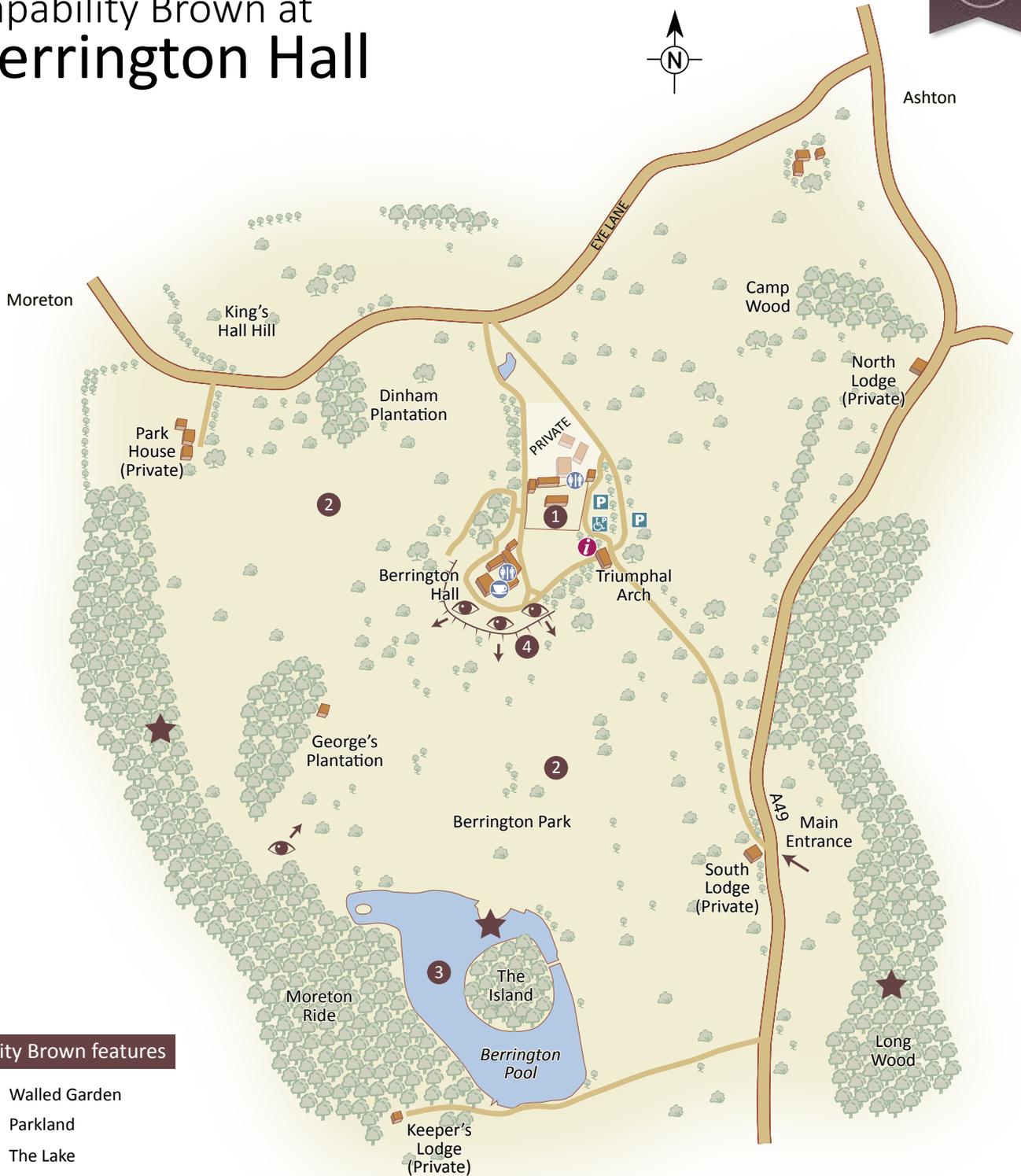
Along the eastern edge is Long Wood, which was extended by Brown. He also planted belts of oak, beech, hornbeam and sweet chestnut along the western boundary in Moreton Ride. Brown is likely to have designed the carriage drive that ran along this side of the park, outside the trees, giving views towards the hill fort of Croft Ambrey and the Brecon Beacons in Wales. A new route for this ride was laid out inside the strip of woodland during the early 20th century. Part of the old ride is now a farm track.

Ha-ha and gateway

At Berrington a brick ha-ha (sunken wall and ditch) separates the pleasure grounds and gardens from the parkland. Both the ha-ha and eastern drive, which sweeps around the side of the mansion, are thought to be part of Brown's design. Inside this area are lawns to the east, south and west of the house. From the hall, the grassy parkland, studded with trees, slopes gently south towards the lake.

Henry Holland Junior also built a freestanding Roman arch gateway at the entrance to the pleasure grounds, in the same red sandstone as the house. This also acts as an eye-catcher, with four plane trees lining one side of the view towards it.

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Capability Brown features

- 1 Walled Garden
- 2 Parkland
- 3 The Lake
- 4 Ha-ha
- ★ Eye-catcher
- ↑ Viewpoint
- ⌒ Ha-ha
- 🌲 Specimen trees
- 🌳 Woodland or copse
- 🌳 Parkland trees
- 🌱 Shrubbery
- 📍 Visitor Centre
- ☕ Refreshments
- 🚻 Toilets
- P Parking
- ♿ Disabled Parking

300 yards
300 metres



Parkland planted with specimen trees © National Trust Images

Walled garden

Although Brown's plan for Berrington has not survived, he probably built the unusual horseshoe-shaped kitchen garden north of the house. A curved wall was thought by some to improve air circulation, though it was more difficult and expensive to build this way. Brown's curved kitchen garden wall at Berrington faces south and measures 73 metres across at its widest point. The wall is red brick, unlike the house and arch.

The Ordnance Survey of 1815 shows an egg-shaped enclosure, but by 1844 it had been altered to a standard square design. Recent archaeological research at the site suggests that the curved wall was part of Brown's design, later altered by the addition of a rectangular wall.

Biodiversity at Berrington

At Berrington Hall the parkland features support a variety of habitats including wood pasture and parkland, deciduous woodland, good quality semi-improved grassland and several large pools which support wetland habitats such as lowland fens and reedbeds.

Berrington Pool is a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), and is a small but deep mere (lake or pond) in a steep-sided hollow containing rich emergent flora of species, such as the uncommon slender sedge. The aquatic invertebrates are important, particularly the dragonflies as ten species are known to breed here.

See www.capabilitybrown.org/garden/berrington-hall for further information about Berrington Pool SSSI.

Berrington after Brown

After Brown's death in 1783, work continued at Berrington until 1806, under foreman Christian Sanderson. It took many more years for the trees to mature, creating the fully formed landscape that Brown had designed.

Thomas Harley had no male heir, and Berrington Hall passed through marriage to the Rodney family, who lived there until 1901. The next owner, Frederick Cawley, restored some of the Georgian features in the house (now listed Grade I), which was taken over by the National Trust in 1957, along with the rest of the estate.

The park and gardens are now listed Grade II* and remain largely unchanged. Some bigger trees that were blocking the views have been felled. There are plans to remove the 19th-century George's Plantation in stages, as it blocks views from the house into the wider landscape.



Baby heron at Berrington © National Trust Images