Lancelot ‘Capability’ Brown improved the landscape park at Weston between 1765 and 1768 for Sir Henry Bridgeman, 5th Baronet (later 1st Earl of Bradford). The 1,000-acre estate lies on the border of Shropshire and Staffordshire. Sir Henry inherited it through his mother in 1762 and moved there from Castle Bromwich. He and Lady Bridgeman engaged Brown to create a fashionable new landscape park at Weston, as opposed to the formal gardens at their previous home. They are said to have spent the enormous sum of over £12,000 (over £20 million in 2015) on improvements, including work by Brown and architect James Paine and buying French furniture and Gobelins tapestries for the house.

Brown’s plan for Weston Park was only discovered a few years ago, among other documents from the house deposited in the Staffordshire Archives. He was responsible for improvements in three areas: the walled gardens, the pleasure grounds – Shrewsbury Walk and Temple Wood – protected by a ha-ha (sunken wall and ditch) and the enlarged Town or Church Pool. The work was specified in two contracts, and cost a total of £1,725 (£2.9 million in 2015).

Weston Park: www.weston-park.com

Particular thanks to Gareth Williams of the Weston Park Foundation

For more information about Brown and his work go to capabilitybrown.org/research
Brown’s contracts and plan

Brown's first contract, dated September 1765, is for £765 (£1.3 million in 2015) and included the making of a ha-ha (sunken wall and ditch) sweeping around the southern part of the pleasure grounds to keep out the deer, preparing trees and shrubs for planting, filling in the old Square Pond and levelling the ground and sowing it with grass or Dutch clover.

The second contract was signed in July 1766, before work had been completed, and was for £960 (£1.6 million in 2015). This covered the creation of what is now Temple Wood, extending the ha-ha "to the triangular Elm grove where the Dairy and Greenhouse were proposed to be", further levelling "lowering the Hill in the manner agreed to by Sr. Henry" and continuing the drive from the hall door of the house to the offices.

Brown's plan was probably drawn partly by his draughtsman John Spyers. Comparing it to an 1806 map of Weston has helped to identify which features Brown introduced in the park.

Pleasure Grounds

The Shrewsbury Walk is a broad gravel walk flanked by lawns and specimen trees, including mature sweet chestnuts. On the south side of the walk is Penderel's Cave, a grotto which was said to be the occasional residence of a mendicant (beggar). The walk gives views across the park towards the 500m-long Park Pool, formed by draining the surrounding land.

Pauslip’s Tunnel leads from the stables under the drive to the Eastern pleasure grounds. Walks lead through the pleasure grounds, well planted with sweet chestnut and beech trees (and more modern exotic species), and around chain of pools. The largest of these is Temple Pool, created after Brown's work from the earlier Fountain Pool.

Walled Gardens

The walled Kitchen Gardens originally produced fruit and vegetables for the Bridgeman family, their guests and staff. Building work on the 4.5 acres of garden is recorded in 1770, on a sheltered south-facing slope. Running from east to west across the centre of the gardens is a heated wall with pavilions, boiler houses and sheds.
Capability Brown at Weston Park

Capability Brown features

1. Temple Wood Pleasure Grounds
2. Temple of Diana
3. Chain of pools
4. Shrewsbury Walk Pleasure Grounds
5. Kitchen garden
6. Penderel's Cave
7. Pauslip's Tunnel
8. Roman Bridge
9. Eye-catcher
10. Viewpoint

Symbols:
- Ha-ha
- Specimen trees
- Woodland or copse
- Parkland trees
- Shrubbery

Visitor Centre
Refreshments
Toilets
Parking

150 yards
150 metres
Menagerie and Dairy

One of the most interesting aspects of the plan is that it shows a “Menagerie and Dairy” within Temple Wood on the site now occupied by the Temple of Diana. This was designed by architect James Paine in around 1770 and is a truly multi-purpose building. On the ground floor were an orangery, octagonal music room and circular tea room giving views to the menagerie, and in the basement were the dairies. The menagerie, as in several of Brown’s other parks, was not for animals but for exotic birds, who animated the scene with their bright colours and strange calls.

The Temple had two very different façades: the octagonal North block facing Temple Pool and the South façade of the orangery overlooking the park. These would have been seen in sequence from the original entrance drive to the house, so that they looked like two different buildings.

In around 1770 Paine designed the Roman Bridge, which carried the entrance drive over the pool in Temple Wood. Nearby are two stone urns which were originally at nearby Tong Castle. Paine may also have designed Penderel’s Cave, Pauslip’s Tunnel and the Pink Cottage at the east end of the grounds.

Biodiversity at Weston

At Weston Park the parkland features support a variety of habitats including wood pasture and parkland, ancient woodland, deciduous woodland, mixed broadleaved and coniferous woodland, good quality semi improved grassland and habitats associated with the lake including reedbeds.

Weston Park today

Weston was gifted to the nation by Richard, the 7th and present Earl, and, with the aid of the National Heritage Memorial Fund, is now in the care of the Trustees of The Weston Park Foundation. The house is available for functions and weddings and the Temple of Diana can be rented for a holiday. The pleasure grounds and park survive almost unaltered, and are registered at Grade II*. Weston Park is open to visitors in the summer; see www.weston-park.com for details.